

ABSTRACT

The Poetics of God: Exegesis and Story in Six Parables of Christ

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In this thesis, I propose to examine six parables of Christ through the interpretive tools common to patristic and medieval forms of exegesis. Beginning with a close examination of primary sources, I consider the fundamental assumptions made by pre-fifteenth century commentators about the nature of the Scripture, our engagement with it, and their particular theological position within the story of our Faith as a whole. Having detailed specific consideration of major and minor commentators, I then proceed to exegete six parables on my own, drawing on the whole of Scripture, the deuterocanonical texts, and the varying commentators previously explored to interpret the passages in an art that has been largely lost in our anti-Incarnational, post-Descartes modern hermeneutic. Grouping the parables into three paradigms—eschatological, subversive, and violent—I read the parables against each other, against the Scripture, and in conversation with the Tradition, arguing for a consideration of the Scripture that emphasizes the poetic language by which God speaks, teaching in story as a means to continually converse with His people throughout time.

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THE POETICS OF GOD
EXEGESIS AND STORY IN SIX PARABLES OF CHRIST

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For all who have died in the communion of your Church, and those whose faith is known to you alone, that, with all the saints, they may have rest in that place where there is no pain or grief, but life eternal, we pray to you, O Lord. Amen.

God is a novelist. He uses all sorts of literary devices: alliteration, assonance, rhyme, synecdoche, onomatopoeia. But of all these, His favorite is foreshadowing.

— Lauren F. Winner, *Girl Meets God*

Introduction

This thesis was born out of a desire to engage the current form of homiletics popular today, which largely concerns itself with application driven styles of exegesis or attempts to relativize the Word to a modern audience. What this form of exegesis misses, all too often, is the nature of Scripture as a story, God's unfolding revelation of Himself to His people, and a journey that must be read in whole, in conversation with itself, and not in parts stripped of context. To that end, this thesis is an experiment in spiritual exegesis, considering six parables of Christ through an interpretive lens rooted in the style of the patristic and medieval traditions.

This thesis, therefore, fits into a strange genre. Whereas most academic theses explore a proposed problem or address a specific question, this thesis is an exploratory work. It opens with a survey of the patristic and medieval tradition but thereafter transitions into an exercise of exegesis outright, with only peripheral reference to previous theologians and large use of the Scripture itself. This is intentional, as most exegetical forms of commentary in the patristic and medieval world borrow heavily from one another but are quoted little. I am indebted to their wisdom, to their methods of reading, but it is these methods I now take and employ myself.

It should be briefly noted, then, what is meant here by exegesis. I have chosen to confine my remarks on the exegetical tradition to those most closely linked to direct commentary on the Scripture, not artistic expressions, literary or otherwise, that present a form of exegesis.

Further, I should explain that I chose to use primarily the King James translation of the Scripture throughout this work, primarily because of its poetic nature.

The layout of this thesis is simple: I open by discussing the patristic and medieval forms of interpretation by looking to specific sources for my evidence and building the picture, I then move on to discuss two parables relating to eschatology, two relating to subversion, and two relating to violence. In the close, I briefly reflect on what this form of exegesis could bring to the modern Church and perhaps what is missing at present.

Ultimately, I would be a fool to not make plain here, from the start, that all attempts to articulate the Scripture that come off in any way well are owed to the good of the Holy Ghost, by whom all things of worth are made known and through whom the Scripture reads us as much as we read it. To Him be all honor and glory, now and forever, with Christ our Lord and the Almighty Father, now and forever, world without end. Amen.

CHAPTER ONE

Parables and Pre-Modern Exegetes

Introduction

A thesis that considers the art and form of specific parables in the Biblical narrative must begin by considering the Scriptures themselves. As auditor of the Text, I bare certain presuppositions regarding it, not least of which concern the historical dating of the individual books, including the four Holy Gospels. Indeed, in a study concerned with parables, the dating of the Gospels proves of particular import. A number of critics—notably Joachim Jeremias—argue that the likely later dating of the Gospels warrants an interpretive and textual criticism that focuses on problems of translation spanning decades. It is thus argued that there is need to find the most basic form of the narrative parables themselves, free of embellishments or interpretive reconstructions by the different Gospel authors. This line of argumentation points to a fluidity in the Text that leaves little to be desired in terms of establishing intent, purpose, or even meaning. If the primary concern of a proper study of the Gospels is rooted in a fundamental argument of doubt, questioning what the Gospels appear to disagree on and subsequently postulating as to why, the role of the Text as authority, as inspired by Holy Ghost, is removed as the center upon which the spiritual and academic discipline of Biblical hermeneutics turn. Rather, the centrality of the Text as authority becomes a spoke on a wheel whose center is the presumption of error. My particular interest in a literary analysis of the parables, however, disposes me to avoid the approach made by Robert

Alter for Old Testament poetry. In addition, my suppositions regarding the historical standing of the Gospels are adopted from the excellent philological studies of Fr. Claude Tresmontant, which I would like to consider in summary here. The reasoning behind providing this historical argument is simple: it is the responsibility of an exegete to be clear and forthcoming as to his presuppositions regarding the Biblical text itself before proceeding to comment on it.

I am indebted to the late Father's stunning work *Le Christ hébreu (The Hebrew Christ: Language in the Age of the Gospels)*, in which he argues for a dating of the Gospels much earlier than those posited by the schools of criticism that emerged out of German Higher Criticism beginning in the eighteenth century.¹ Tresmontant rejects the perspective that dates the Gospels and the Apocalypse as follows: Mark, between 65-70 AD; Luke, between 70-90 AD; Matthew, between 85-100 AD; the Apocalypse, between 90-100 AD; and, John, between 90-120 AD.² Instead, he advocates a much more conservative—and according to his argument, contextually substantive—dating: Matthew, shortly after the resurrection; John, also shortly after the resurrection; Luke, between 40-60 AD; Mark, between 50-60 AD; and the Apocalypse, about 60 AD.³ He arrives at these dates by drawing on three principles of investigation: that there are Hebraic origins in the linguistics of the Greek Gospels, marking them as translations from

¹This includes source, form, redaction, and even radical criticism.

²Claude Tresmontant, *The Hebrew Christ: Language in the Age of the Gospels*, trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989) 26.

³*Ibid.*, 324.

originally Hebrew notes into Greek texts; and, that the individual Gospels were written with specific audiences in mind.

Fr. Tresmontant first engages his theory of origins by looking to the Hebraic roots apparent in the translations of the Gospels into Greek. He begins by considering rabbinic practices at the time of Christ's earthly ministry. It was not uncommon for the disciples of a rabbi to record his teachings and movements, a historical precedent long established and supported in the literature.⁴ Accordingly, Fr. Tresmontant contends what he finds to be self-evident, that "it is completely absurd to suppose that disciples of Jesus who were educated would not have written down something about the acts and gestures, the teaching and hence the actual words, of their Lord and Master. And once anything had been written about Jesus in Hebrew, it was no doubt shared with other disciples who could read and write Hebrew."⁵ He goes on to elaborate that the variations in the Gospels, in part, is owed to the different education levels, theological leanings, and general interests of the eyewitnesses to the events of our Lord's life who were themselves the Hebraic scribes of the notes that the Greek Gospels were translated from. Fr. Tresmontant considers these elements in light of the historical context of the Gospel translators, who lived just after the completion of the Septuagint. The popularity of the Septuagint in the time of the diaspora under Roman authority leads Tresmontant to consider its influence to be evident on the translators of the Hebraic notes. The

⁴See Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, "The Orality of Rabbinic Writing," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 38-57.

⁵Tresmontant, *Le Christ hébreu*, 7.

translators of the Septuagint were faced with the enormous task of transmuting the language of the Hebrews, which considered time in aspects of present and not present into the language of the Greeks, which considered time in minutiae of details. Moreover, Hebrew words or idioms, such as *berith*, meaning *covenant*, occur with great frequency throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and required an agreed-upon translation for the sake of consistency in the LXX. These two elements of translation care are responsible for the impressive agreement throughout the Septuagint. This lead Fr. Tresmontant to conclude, as he considered the Greek of the LXX and the Greek of the Gospels, “that the Greek translators of the basic Hebrew documents that lie behind our Gospels made use of the same base lexicon or dictionary used by the translators of the Septuagint.”⁶ Therefore, he contends, the Greek Gospels were not late, editorialized narratives written by Gentiles, but early Hebraic writings that were translated using the standards and lexical styles already established by the Septuagint.

Tresmontant further argues that the individual Gospels translated from the Hebrew notes are reflective of the translators’ commitment to a certain audience for the text. This serves two purposes within his argument: first, it establishes a reading of the Gospels with respect to audience; second, it argues for a dating of the texts appropriate to the audience that would receive them. It is fairly facile for the Father to argue that if the audience first to receive the Gospel were the Jews themselves, then Matthew and John were the first writings to be recorded: Matthew, because it focuses intently on the role of the Law; John, because it is structured around the feasts and fasts. In explaining this,

⁶Ibid., 17.

Tresmontant places the narrative elements in Matthew against those missing from Luke and Mark; chiefly, passages that speak directly to Jewish identity as it relates to the coming of the Messiah. He considers excerpts such as the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 who comes to Christ to be healed of a demon but is turned away, for Jesus says that He was sent for the lost sheep of Israel. When the woman persists, arguing that even the dogs are able to eat the crumbs of the table, Jesus praises her faith and heals her. That this episode is missing from Luke and Mark as well as the parables that use primarily Hebraic images—such as the ten virgins, or the shepherd image of Ezekiel—leads Tresmontant to conclude that “nothing is more reasonable to explain the disappearance from Mark of [these passages]. What is difficult, if not impossible, to explain, though, is how a saying as difficult as this could ever have been added by somebody writing near the end of the first century.”⁷ Furthermore, Tresmontant points to the translation differences between Matthew and Luke, such as in translating the word for *awen*--rabbinic law, Mosaic Law, *Torah* itself. While Matthew renders it with the Greek *anomia*, along with St. Paul in his epistles, Luke does not use the word but a Greek variant.⁸ From this and other philological differences, Tresmontant argues that an essential logic must be at work in the dating of the Gospels. Was the command not to go into "Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth"?⁹ Therefore, the individual texts of the Gospels must have been considered with

⁷Ibid., 135.

⁸Ibid., 147

⁹Acts 1:8 New American Standard Bible

respect to audience--first as being delivered to Jews, then to Gentiles. Matthew and John, containing a Greek analogous to the Greek of the LXX and framed narratively for a Jewish audience can thus be determined as being earliest. Luke and Mark, missing crucial narrative elements that would have been easily received by a Jewish audience but not by a Gentile one, along with grammar and vocabulary styled in a Greek linguistically opposed to the LXX means they were not intended for a Jewish audience and should be dated later.

In addition to Tresmontant's approach to dating the Gospels, I also draw on the words of St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*, *Prima Pars*, I.10, when he considers "Whether Sacred Scripture conveys several senses under a single word."¹⁰ In part of his reply, the Angelic Doctor writes, "The things signified by the words can be themselves types of other things. Thus in Sacred Scripture no confusion results, for all the senses are found on one--the literal--from which alone can any argument be drawn ... Nothing in Holy Scripture perishes on account of this, since nothing necessary to faith is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense."¹¹ It is this approach to the Text I have adopted when considering it as literature, observing the parables as complex narratives that contain an initial, literal meaning pertinent to faith but at the same time thence layered with the other senses of

¹⁰St. Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Knowledge of God: Prologue and Questions 1-4, 12-13 of the First Part (Prima Pars) of the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, ed. Robert Miner. Xerox course packet for use in PHI 2305, "Philosophy and Religion," Baylor University, Fall 2005.

¹¹Ibid.

interpretation, creating within each narrative what could be likened to a microcosm within the cosmos of the Word.¹²

Having a structure within which to both date and interpret the Gospels through a lens of historical context and textual authority, I am free to reject some of the conclusions made by Joachim Jeremias in his seminal volume *The Parables of Jesus*. In his treatment of the parables, Jeremias makes three claims contrary to the approach of this thesis: that they have an inherently simple meaning that is understood best through literal, historical-context based approach; that they are in error or not original because of translation and differences among the Gospels, requiring comparison, for instance, with the Gospel of Thomas; and, that they are originally without references to the Scriptures or have been later embellished by translators to include them.

First, Jeremias contends from the inception of his argument that each parable "has a definite historical setting."¹³ Thereafter he elaborates on this in a footnote: the parables "could give us an idea of their full value only if we knew in every case what ideas of the preacher were intended to be illustrated by each individual example," which indicates that we can only understand the parables "if we can reconstruct for ourselves the precise

¹²This is also to keep within the mystery of faith St. Paul speaks to in the first letter to the Corinthians, that "Christ Jesus, who became to us the wisdom of God ... [yet] God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predetermined before the ages to our glory." (1 Cor. 1:30, 2:7 NASB) Each parable, spoken by the Wisdom of God, contains the wisdom of God, within that wisdom diversity as representative of the perfect Wisdom, vestiges of the divine attributes, providing abundant possibilities of interpretation in and of themselves while at the same time not disclosing the whole of the Wisdom in a single story.

¹³Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 22.

situation in which Jesus uttered it."¹⁴ The tenability of this position is moot in context of a literary reading of the parables that embraces the Thomistic view of the senses of Scripture as previously discussed. The precise situation in which Jesus first spoke a parable, though of interest to a purely historical approach, does not add value to the literary approach, in that it does not allow for the multiplicity of meaning contained in the *literal*, as Aquinas refers to and understands it.

Second, in order to approach what he considers to be the proper historical context of the parables, Jeremias claims that it is necessary to reduce the parables of the Synoptic Gospels to base narratives, without the individual liberties taken by the transcribers. To do this, Jeremias does not strip the parables down based upon Matthew, Mark, and Luke alone but with consideration of the Gospel of Thomas, deferring to its series of aphorisms as potentially the most fundamental text.¹⁵ His claim of structural disparity and the need for a base text by which to evaluate the parables is immaterial when considered alongside the historical arguments of Tresmontant, who maintained that the diversity of the Gospels was more an issue of audience, written in close proximity to the events, than retold and embellished stories cultivated over the century following the resurrection of our Lord. Therefore, Jeremias's assertion that base parables situated in precise historical context is

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵This particularly concerns Jeremias when it comes to the role of Scriptural references within the parables themselves, claiming that they "should not be regarded as belonging to the original form of the tradition." (31) He also isolates what appear to be folk story influences within the period, drawing on the work of Cerfaux in "Les Paraboles du Royaume dans l'Évangile de Thomas" in *Le Muséon*, 70 (1957), 134. The issue of Scriptural reference is addressed below.

both unsuccessful in a literary approach and does not hold when placed beside the scholarship of dating afforded by Tresmontant.

Lastly, Jeremias specifically points to embellishment with regard to the citation of Scripture within the parables as part of his argument for needing to determine the essential narratives, claiming that Scriptural citation was a product of the orality of the parables in the primitive Church.¹⁶ He reasons that the continual retelling of the parables resulted in embellishment of the stories based on audience and speaker, combined with a sense of interpretive authority by the use of Scripture interwoven in the parables to explain them that was not originally from the mouth of Christ but added by His auditors. However, as above, an acceptance of Tresmontant's historical dating and theories regarding audience concerning the Gospels rejects the theory of Jeremias on this account in favor of a written corpus containing exegetical references to the Scriptures provided originally by Christ Himself. Therefore, the assumption that the parables have a meaning that exists outside of the confines of the accompanying Scriptures used in some cases within the Gospel narratives to comment and interpret them is proved insufficient if a conservative reading and dating of the Gospels is to be maintained.

Taking the principles gleaned from Fr. Tresmontant and St. Aquinas in tandem, I proceed to move beyond the interpretive methodology of Jeremias in search of a hermeneutic that is both faithful to the historical Text and the historical reception of the Text. I consider this part of the exploration as concerned with poetics, the literary approach this thesis seeks to take when considering the parables themselves. By looking

¹⁶Ibid., 23, 27-31.

to Biblical interpretation in two major periods—patristic and medieval—I am able to distill a hermeneutic that both honors the Text within the model of historicity established by Tresmontant and upholds the great conversation of the Tradition as it has been passed down to us.

Engaging the Exegetical Tradition

It should be noted that while the patristic and medieval periods had similar models of exegesis, the principle distinction was with regard to locus. The patristics worked out the issues of dogma primarily through counsels, while the medievals built theology through the cloister. These two models stand in opposition to the modern form of exegesis, in which the locus was the individual creature and the stretch of a man's arm the stretch of his theological prerogative. Whereas the patristic and medieval loci were placed in a dialogue of community, the modern exegetical form was centered on the creature alone. This change of locus brought with it a change in the reading and interpretation of the Text with ramifications still felt in the Church today. The movement from counsel to cloister to creature is explored below.

The Fathers

While exegesis of the Scriptures—both Old and as the New was in process of canonization—was central to the patristic focus, it was unquestionably concerned about and in response to the Christological controversy of the early centuries AD. Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, and Theodore

of Mopsuestia were to name a few, each presenting an argument regarding the divinity of Christ.¹⁷ These arguments were built around varying interpretive models inherited from—or perhaps commandeered—the Jews. Jaroslav Pelikan has explained that the early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr and Eusebius polemicized the Jewish Scriptures against the Christian, claiming that passages that appeared in the LXX that failed to appear in the Hebraic writings indicated the Jews had blotted out those verses in the Hebrew text that pointed to Christ as the Messiah.¹⁸ This claim was in a way an exegetical move, one that sought to place Israel in opposition to the New Israel of the Church, whereby the Scriptures were read subsequently to the fulfillment of the Law in Christ and the consummation of God’s covenant with His people in the Church. There were cultural shifts as well. Whereas the Hellenized Jews had previously enjoyed a reputation for being those who “travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte,” the growing Christian community began to eclipse the zeal for the faith.¹⁹ While the Jews had been prepared for the Greek influence in the diaspora by providing the LXX

¹⁷In particular, see “Chapter 61” of Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas Patrick Halton (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2003), 93-97; Méliton de Sardes, *Homélie sur la Pâque* (Bodmer: Bibliothèque Bodmer, 1960); Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* (Seattle: Createspace, 2010), 40-69; Tertullian, “Against Praxeas” and “On the Flesh of Christ” in *The Christological Controversy*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Norris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 61-63, 64-72; Origen, “On First Principles” in *The Classics of Western Spirituality: Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (New Jersey: Paulist Press, Inc., 1979), 171-216; Athanasius, *The orations of St. Athanasius against the Arians according to the Benedictine text*, ed. William Bright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008); and, Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Syriac Fragments (Syriac Studies Library) (Latin Edition)* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011). Each of these texts in whole or in part illustrate how the Scripture was used pervasively to defend varying positions, all relying on exegetical focus.

¹⁸Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 19-21.

¹⁹Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 20.

translation, the Hebrew Scriptures were not further translated by the Jews into Latin, despite the increasing influence of the Roman tongue. This work of translation was owed to anonymous Christians and eventually Jerome, such that the Christians essentially took possession of the Hebrew Scriptures by default, in no small way thanks to the evolving linguistic culture.²⁰ This, coupled with the defensive stance taken by the Jewish authorities toward the Christians after the sack of Jerusalem in 70 AD, created an atmosphere of mechanical progress: the Jews were being pulled away from in order to give way to the Christians, such that the historical circumstances seemed confirmation in themselves, strengthened by the exegetical stance of the early Christian auditors who read the Church as the New Israel, come to displace the Old—both literally in the destruction of Jerusalem and anagogically in the interpretation of the Scriptures themselves. Subsequently, as time went on the Christians writing against the Jews began to take them “less seriously ... and what their apologetic works may have lacked in vigor or fairness, they tended to make up in self-confidence.”²¹ So too exegesis moved into the control of the Christians, who progressed away from rabbinic exegetical focus and instead concerned themselves with the personhood of Christ; initially with regard to actuality—the prophetic words concerning Him as Messiah—eventually with regard to substantially—the *quidditas* of the God-Man.

But the concern over Christ as Person was not a limiting exegetical position. If Christ was indeed the “wisdom from God,” then it was by and through Him all Scripture

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 21.

could and should be considered, opening the possibility for myriad of study and means of considering the text.²² It was thus that exegesis in the hands of such Fathers as Origen and Irenaeus blossomed. Where Origen took hold of a single word in the Scriptures, twenty strands of interpretive thought raveled out, each worthy of consideration and care.²³ This was not at the expense of the Christological question but in conversation with it, for as the early Christians understood and as the Tradition of the saints has affirmed since, the whole of the Christian teaching must reconcile itself in the reality of the incarnate Messiah. To this end, R. R. Reno has defended Origen along with other early patristics for their particular concern with the multiple senses of singular words in Scripture, arguing against those criticizing what they perceive as an obsession over word studies and futile concerns against the serious work of historical context and application.²⁴ In “Origen and Spiritual Interpretation,” Reno sees that the method of interpretation Origen uses, which includes such approaches as etiological studies of Old Testament names being fulfilled by analogues in the New and numerological comparisons as signifiers for spiritual instruction, is rooted in a firmly apostolic approach to the Scriptures.²⁵ Reno notes no difference in the style of typological readings made by St. Paul concerning the children of Sarah and Hagar than Origen’s assessment of the

²²1 Cor. 1:30

²³See, for instance, Origen’s commentary on the Gospel of St. John with regard to the first verse and the use of the word ἀρχή and what, then, is meant by the sense of *beginning*. Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 52-59.

²⁴See *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Volume 1*, eds. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 475.

²⁵R. R. Reno, “Origen and Spiritual Interpretation,” *Pro Ecclesia* XV, 1 (2006): 108-126.

name Ramses in the Exodus having an analogue to the moth that devours earthly treasure referred to by Jesus in the Gospels. Indeed, he contends that for Origen, “Irenaeus and the patristic tradition as a whole, scripture is the semiotic medium in which God encodes the pattern of the divine economy. How scripture is so encoded remains obscure” and therefore the responsibility of the patristic commentator was to faithfully expound all possible responses so as to better appreciate and participate in the exegetical mystery of the Text, of God incarnate Himself.²⁶

As we have seen, historically, the usurping of the Jewish tradition for the Christian came less by conquest and more by cultural mechanism.²⁷ This is not to suggest, however, that Jewish culture itself existed outside and against the Christian ethos. Rather, the early Christian heresies had many of their roots in Judaism and, more significantly, the exegetical structure of the early writers made the “church ... the inheritor of the promises and prerogatives of the Jews” such that Justin and Irenaeus in turn made the church the new synagogue, the Christians the chosen people, and the like.²⁸ All of this was concerned with the Christological question and the relationship of the Christians to it, as individuals and as the Church. Ultimately, it was “this appropriation of Jewish Scriptures and of the heritage of Israel [that] helped Christianity to survive the

²⁶Ibid., 110. Again, the return is to a focus on Christ.

²⁷Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 22.

²⁸Ibid., 26.

destruction of Jerusalem and to argue that with the coming of Christ Jerusalem had served its purpose in the divine plan and could be forsaken.”²⁹

It was within this context that the early writers were free to interpret, having moved beyond and yet within the Jewish origins. As Reno notes, there was at the same time no patristic consensus regarding the notion of inspiration, let alone the most appropriate way to interpret the Scriptures.³⁰ Within the common teachings of the Church, there was an ease of exegetical freedom. It was with this freedom that the First Council of Nicea in 325 AD was concerned, marking an indirect change in the exegetical *laissez-faire*. As politicized Christianity may have become under Constantine, the need to establish the relation of Christ to the Father was paramount. Adoptionism and Arianism as they related to the orthodox harmony of the faith aside, it was on the dogma of incarnational relation that major claims of the exegetical structures of writers and commentators turned. Without a dogmatic claim made by the Church, for instance, Praxeas had exegeted from a view of the Trinity that denied distinction in Persons, to which Tertullian was particularly opposed but on the basis of his exegesis and a claim to inherited tradition alone.³¹ Nicea marked the first time since the Council of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles that the whole of the Church convened to decide an issue of theological import and the ramifications for exegesis should not be underestimated. Nicea brought the weight of defining heresy and establishing the parameters within which

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰R. R. Reno, “Origen and Spiritual Interpretation,” 112.

³¹Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, trans. Dr. Holmes, (London: OrthodoxEBooks, 2010).

one could believe as well as formulate, a fundamental aspect of exegetical authority thereafter restrained by the delicate tension of orthodoxy.

Subsequently, while St. Augustine is arguably responsible for the major developments in the Church in the late patristic period, it was the exegetical style of St. Jerome that synthesized the Christological question and its relation to Scriptural interpretation, the model upon which the medieval world established itself. This was, in no small part, indebted to the closed canon of the Scripture decided before but largely unquestioned in late fourth and early fifth centuries. Though far from the Reformation's version of *scriptura scripturam interpretatur*, Jerome nonetheless rephrased the exegetical question concerning Christ not only as concerned with defining Christ as Person but also as Christ as the key to interpreting the whole. For instance, he focuses on the Gospel of St. Luke and the Emmaus episode, where Christ, walking with two disciples who are unaware of who He is, exegetes the whole of the Scriptures concerning Himself until He is ultimately recognized in the breaking of the bread. Jerome took this passage to be the exegetical model, Scripture interpreting the Scriptures as discerned through the reality of the Λόγος. He focused principally on the proclamation of the disciples upon realizing who Christ was: "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"³² It was from this Jerome argued to Pope Damasus "that it is the Spirit's ministration that 'warms' the heart when Scripture is opened."³³ This became Jerome's exegetical leaning, that the power of

³²Luke 24:32 King James Version

³³Marshall, I. Howard. "Emmaus." *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. ed. David L. Jeffrey. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 236.

Holy Ghost working in the Christian became the means of understanding the Text, while at the same time he maintained a firm belief in the exegetical mode being aligned with orthodoxy. This was, if a line is to be drawn between the patristics giving way to the medievals, taken up in the last by St. Gregory the Great, whose *glossa* on the passage read: “And the Lord was present to them outwardly, but did not show them who he was. He manifested his presence to them as they talked about him, but hid the appearance by which they would recognize him on account of their doubts.”³⁴ It was in the conversation, governed by the dogmatic solidarity of The First Council of Constantinople, The Council of Ephesus, The Council of Chalcedon, and the Second Council of Constantinople, that the patristic exegetical model of the centrality of the Λόγος as interpretive key was established and upon which the medievals began to build.

The Medievals

As mentioned above, while the patristic and medieval periods shared much in exegetical style, execution was quite different. Exegesis and theological conversation moved from the councils to the cloisters, but it did not do so suddenly. Rather, the Church in the East and the traditions of the ascetic monks slowly progressed into the West as Constantine’s Rome crumbled and the age of the patristics gave way. Thus, the conception of Western monasticism was brought about slowly, brewing in the background from the earliest years of the Faith and in order to understand this, we must retreat in history briefly before we may resume our course of study.

³⁴Erik Thunø, *Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Rome* (Rome: L’erina di Bretetschneider, 2002), 104.

The monastic tradition in its earliest form grew out of the problem of Constantine, whose legalization of Christianity brought with it the sting of removed persecution. Without persecution, how was the Faith of the individual to be tried by fire and refined?³⁵ This invoked what C.H. Lawrence has termed the “call of the desert,” in which early fourth century Christians began to seek a way of life that rejected the perceived increasing sense of worldliness that was stirring in the Church in conjunction with imperial approval, marking the inception of the monastic life.³⁶ The earliest monks took to the deserts of Egypt, Syria, and Judea, but the principle origin of the two forms of monastic models came from Alexandria, among the Coptic-speaking Christians. The first was the eremitic, from the Greek ἐρημίτης, *of the dessert*, and was inspired by St. Anthony (c. 251-356). The eremitic life was one of solitary reflection, removed from all communities so as to focus energies on the defeat of temptation and the contemplation of God, mirroring the path of Christ Himself.³⁷ This did not always prove effective. In his hagiographic account of Anthony, St. Athanasius recounts how “as [Anthony] attracted growing numbers of sightseers, he withdrew to a ruined fortress on the edge of the desert, and lived there in solitude for twenty years.”³⁸ Afterward he became a charismatic teacher, such that the desert became populated with monks throughout, until the end of his life, right before which he retreated to a remote oasis near the Red Sea. By the time

³⁵1 Pet. 1:7

³⁶C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 3.

³⁷Ibid., 5.

³⁸Ibid.

of Anthony's death in 356, "the mountain of Nitria to the west of the Nile delta and the inner desert of Scetis, forty miles to the south, had been settled by colonies of hermits."³⁹ Slowly, these colonies evolved into communities. The essential questions of lifestyle—food, shelter, and clothing—still needed to be accounted for. There was also the question of pious sightseers, who presented the possibility of new converts to the lifestyle. Accordingly, the colony adapted.

The leaders of the movement enjoined their disciples to work for their livelihood. Out of the raw materials available in the region of the Nile they produced baskets, mats, ropes and linen, which could be exchanged for basic necessities. The marketing of these products was left to the agents in the local villages, so that the monks themselves could preserve their solitude.⁴⁰

Thus, the eremitic life proved a delicate balance of seclusion and engagement, the spiritual discipline focused primarily on the mortification of the flesh.

But "man is a social animal. The life of the solitary was full of difficulties and hazards. Only the strong dare to be lonely."⁴¹ Accordingly, the alternate form was from St. Pachomius (c. 292-346), who established at Tabennesis an interconnected group of ascetic monks, creating the hierarchical structure of supervision the abbeys would be known for later, as well as fostering a sense of *communitas* being the principle focus of the Christian experience. The coenobitic life, from the Greek κοινός, *common*, was thus focused on the dialogue of the individual members of the community. Where the ascetic life mortified the flesh through isolation, the coenobitic achieved the same end through

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 5-6

⁴¹Ibid., 7.

kenotic service. In this way, the communities reflected much of acetic tradition inspired by Anthony, but coupled the necessity for the products of life with the community sharing in it.⁴²

Thus, a tenuous pull of the coenobitic and eremitic lives emerged from the East, reconciled eventually in St. Basil, who in the mid-fourth century sought to harmonize fully the two traditions with an emphasis on the role of fellowship, for “the life of the monk in community [was] where spiritual gifts of the more advanced members might be passed on to others.”⁴³ It was Basil’s view of the monastic life in conjunction with his writings, as well as the previously mentioned *Life of St. Anthony*, that brought the ideals of the monastic movement to the West. The stories and accounts were “read with passionate interest in Christian circles at Rome and Milan and at Trier,” along with such texts as *Life of Paul the Hermit*, *History of the Monks of Egypt*, and the *Lausiac History* of Palladius, the *Rule* of Pachomius, *Apophthegmata*, and John Cassian’s *Conferences*.⁴⁴ In turn, Jerome points to Athanasius’s visit to Trier and Rome, corresponding to his years in exile, as being the catalyst for the actual development—beyond the literary fascination—with monasticism in the West, for he brought in body those ideals which had, to that point, only been read.⁴⁵ Indeed, it was the movements of Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315-367) who, along with St. Martin of Tours in the mid-fourth century and his established coenobitic communities in Gaul, who brought embodied

⁴²Ibid., 8

⁴³Ibid., 9

⁴⁴Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵Ibid., 12.

monastic life to the declining Empire. The crumbling political structure that had promised religious unification and a holy ideal under Constantine demanded a replacement as earthly devices failed. It was thus the local community, the composite of spiritual friends, the cloister, which came to serve as the promise of Christian unity when geographic fragmentation, the threat of war, and economic upheaval revealed the futility of man's institutions.

We thus return to the end of the patristic period and the question of exegesis. The history accounted above does little by way of mentioning anything beyond the essential developments of Eastern monasticism's transition to the West, but rooted in that movement is a deep, holistic spiritualism that proved imperative to the medieval conception of exegesis. The role of fellowship of the souls in the monastic tradition and the place of kenotic service bear a consequence on the very ψυχή of an individual, such that an exegetical position on the Text in turn carries a reading that is in conversation with the very external conversations of the cloistered souls. For by the sixth century in the West, the *Regula Benedicti* had become the standard for monastic practice, evolving within the cloisters of Europe over the course of four centuries to focus on, as with the patristics, the Christological question.⁴⁶ As Pelikan notes,

In the tenth and eleventh centuries there was being developed and articulated the characteristically Western understanding of Christ, so that 'the monastic period from the 900 to 1100' has been identified as 'the uncompromisingly Christocentric period of Western civilization'; it was Christocentric for the very

⁴⁶For the purposes of this paper, the historical details of those four centuries have been overlooked in favor of focusing on the theological developments in the exegetical structures. A detailed study of the role of Benedict, along with Gregory the Great, and Boethius (whose *De Trinitate* and *Utrum Pater et Filius* lay the foreground for Christological exegetical styles in the West) may be referenced in Lawrence's text, primarily on pages 18-82.

reason that it was monastic. The *Rule* of Benedict of Nursia had prescribed that one should ‘put nothing ahead of the love of Christ,’ and monastic writers vied with one another in extolling Christ as the source of all good.⁴⁷

The medieval form of exegesis thus returned and followed closely that of the patristic, but it added to it a concern with placing the *expositores*, as the patristics were identified, in relation to various literary genres. The distinguishing factor of the medievals was the form in which their exegesis took, whereas the patristics were principally concerned with sermons, letters, and proclamations, the cloistered life brought with it the disciplined study of grammar and rhetoric, which in turn spawned an exegetical model concerned as much with form as with content.⁴⁸

An objection may be raised that to focus on the literature of the cloister is to overlook the role of the lay exegetical structures of the time. The answer to this concern is found in the historical work of Richard Southern on the life of St. Anselm, in conversation with Pelikan’s theological historicism:

[the] call to follow Christ as leader was addressed to those who were in their ‘time of initiation’ as recruits to the monastic life, rather than to lay Christians. Among lay Christians, moreover, ‘those who set themselves a higher standard than the ordinary looked to the monasteries for their examples.’⁴⁹

It is therefore appropriate to look to the monasteries for the spiritual thought, both lay and religious, for the time period.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 106.

⁴⁸See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 43-55.

⁴⁹Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, 126.

⁵⁰Caroline Walker Bynum has particularly explored this issue as it relates to the monastic conception over and against the spirituality of the regular canons. A detailed study may be found in her

In order to understand the exegetical styles of the monastery, first it is necessary to understand the unique role of history in the lives of the monks, which distinguished them from the later scholastics. Dom. Jean Leclercq has observed that “the historians are almost always monks” within the period, for it was considered part of the monastic discipline to be acquainted with the chronological record. For the medieval religious mind, history was not merely a series of recorded facts; rather, it was a deeply rooted narrative in which the events of the soteriological drama were the focus and purpose.⁵¹ In the prologues of most histories, the monastic scribes belabor “love of the past, and their desire to see it committed to writing so that it should not be forgotten and that others might benefit from all the lessons it held for the future.”⁵² This was the way of *aedificatus*, or the edification of the Body of Christ. History was imperative moral instruction, such that the scribes “wanted to propose examples to be imitated if good, to be avoided if bad.”⁵³ Therefore, as the patristics had taken the Scripture to be exegeted

book *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), in the first essay entitled “The Spirituality of Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century,” 22-58. In addition, Sixten Ringbom’s “Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions: Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety,” published in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, in which the devotional practices of the laity in conversation with the monastic tradition is explored; also, “Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy” by Michael Camille, published in *Art History*, March 1985, details the role of iconographic works inherited through the monastic tradition as the means by which the laity interacted with exegetical models of interpretation. Furthermore, there is something to be said for the distinction of the cathedral schools over those of the monastery. As R. W. Southern writes in *The Making of the Middle Ages*, the distinction between the cathedral schools and monasteries should not be pressed, “but if the image of the bee collecting nectar from many flowers happily expressed the aim of the Benedictine scholar, Bernard [of Chartres, who coined the image of the dwarf standing on the giants of antiquity, chancing to see a bit further] equally happily expressed the aim of a man viewing the world of learning from the greatest of all the cathedral schools.” (203)

⁵¹Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press), 155.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 156.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 158.

purely through the mystery of the Λόγος, the medievals furthered the scope of the discourse to include the whole of history. All events and moments in time participated in the soteriological drama as it unfolded ever-closer to the eschaton, the Latin West having held closely to the words of St. Augustine in the *De ordine*, “all things harmonize into one design and are perfect.”⁵⁴ Therefore, as Dom. Leclercq elaborates,

we find the word *historia* used for the passage from the Bible in the office, in the atmosphere of prayer. All narration is conceived, more or less, in accordance with this model, and the biblical, patristic, and liturgical stamp evident in their ideas as well as in their vocabulary has made it possible to speak of a ‘monastic’ historiography, that is, a monastic way of writing history.⁵⁵

In turn, the pastoral process and the exegetical form of the cloister held close to this conception of history, seeing the Biblical text as narrative truth in accordance to the greater narrative truth of the world as a whole. Exegesis, then, was not a movement of mere exposition, but a broadening dialogue that first recognized the primacy of moral instruction rooted in the dogma of the sovereign hold of God on the whole of history. It was from this theological imagination that the variety of literary genres in the monastery grew, four of which are of import for our course of study: the sermon, the *sententiae*, letters, and a special kind of letter known as the *florilegium*.⁵⁶

⁵⁴St. Augustine, *De ordine*, I.2.4 as translated in the *Fathers of the Church* series.

⁵⁵Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 159.

⁵⁶Other literary genres include the writing of hagiographic narratives, histories, *regula*, legends, commentary, gloss on pagan texts, rhetoric, and *historia* beyond the chronological record, concerned with a blend of hagiographic style and interpretive fact, often detailing the establishment of a monastic order. All of which is expounded upon in Leclercq’s work, in particular the chapters “Liberal Studies” and “Literary Genres.” See also Smalley’s *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* and the chapter “Masters of the Sacred Page.”

Of all texts available to us from the period, the most generous should be the sermons, which would have constituted the majority of the monastic written corpus in the West. However, the nature of the sermon was distinct, for it was rarely recorded, despite the number of sermons we do have from the period that seem to indicate the contrary. This variation is because of the unique role of the sermon in the cloister, which was privileged above all literary genres. The sermon was an essentially patristic form of exegesis, as seen above, and, as we have explored, the medievals were particularly concerned with keeping close to the patristic record.⁵⁷ Furthermore, though the sermon was important in the spirituality of the clerics regular, canons regular, and the secular clergy—these being the most common to be scribed—it was within the cloister that the sermon was considered part of spiritual observance, that is, the sermon was a monastic discipline.⁵⁸ According to the majority of the *regula* still in existence, the sermon was often given twice a day in a form of *collatio*, echoing rabbinic and early Church sensibilities: the monks would gather together before and at the close of day's work, a novice would show the selected passage—either from the Bible, the patristics, or the *Rule*—to the superior for approval, then would proceed to read until interrupted for the *Tu autem*, when the superior exegeted for the benefit of the assembled monks, and so it would continue until the completed reading of the passage.⁵⁹ These were the delivered sermons, those exegetical moments that we receive in one of two ways, either “the author

⁵⁷See Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* and the chapter “The Cistercian Conception of Community” and the conclusions regarding the evidence of variation in the monastic corpus.

⁵⁸See Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 167.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

himself writes and then revises and assembles isolated texts which through dissemination had passed beyond his control ... [or] auditors write up another's sermons, sometimes without his knowledge, or even after his death."⁶⁰ It is therefore important to distinguish the pastoral method of the sermon shown above from the formal form of the sermon, which could be recorded in two parts: either as *sententiae* or as written address.

The meaning of the monastic *sententiae* may vary, as it emerged slowly in the life of the cloister. In some cases it referred to the place of brief exegetical remarks instead of a formal sermon. Accordingly, copies of early Cistercian *regula* of the daily office feature the annotation where the Psalms are appointed, *Haec sententia non-exponitur*.⁶¹ However, the more common meaning of the *sententiae* is that of a summary or outline of a formal sermon, either recorded after having been delivered or noted as a guide before speaking. Interestingly, "the dominant characteristic of all these sentences is that they are hardly, if at all, speculative; they are eminently practical."⁶² This principle of exegesis was largely focused on the theological understanding of the monastic life, which was that in the fellowship of souls the work of the Spirit was achieved. Varying monastic *regula* confirm the place of daily practice and discipline as being the root by which devoted spirituality grew; in turn, the *sententiae* contained practical instructions, points of meditation, both from within the monastery and from

Origen, Cassian, and the Fathers ... [which] represent monastic wisdom [and] give us the most faithful account of the topics which were treated daily in the lectures

⁶⁰Ibid., 168.

⁶¹Jean Leclercq, "Textes et manuscrits cisterciens à la Bibliothèque Vaticane," 1959, 10.

⁶²Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 170.

at innumerable abbeys where the abbots were by no means on a level with the outstanding orators whose discourses were normally worth publishing.⁶³

But these common approaches give us the basis for monastic exegesis, which, as has been shown, was principally found in an atmosphere or environment of prayer. The idea of the sermon, especially the sermon modeled on the *sententiae*, without the rule of prayer as its foundation, was repugnant to the monastic way of life.

But the works of the monasteries that account for the largest extant portion of the corpus are the formal sermons, which in turn contain the most pronounced theological discourse of the medieval period. For as Pelikan accounts,

The scholastic theologians of the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, who discoursed so extensively about the celestial hierarchy, wrote relatively little about the ecclesiastical hierarchy or even the nature of the church in general. During these two centuries we must look not primarily to the systematic theologians and summits, not to the canonists and lawyer-popes, but to the monastic exegetes and expository preachers for a comprehensive view of the church.⁶⁴

However, the faithful approach to this reading must be tempered with an understanding of atmosphere. “All the monks were readers. A certain number of them wrote. ... Not that all the writings of the monks were, as with the scholastics, theological in nature; nor that all the monks who wrote or those who read their writings were theologians.”⁶⁵

Rather, the nature of the monastic life, as discussed above, was one oriented toward

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval*, 298. It is also to this end that the school of Chartres, for instance, shall not be a concern of this paper’s approach to the history of theological exegesis. While Chartres and its sister schools proved important in the development of the medieval scholastic mind, they are not as particularly consequential to the development of the theological imagination, to the extent, for instance, that Pelikan only makes a passing reference to Chartres with regard to the reliquaries of the Blessed Virgin (170).

⁶⁵Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 191.

prayer and devotion, which created an environment that was conducive to theological matters being the focus of every moment, no matter how seemingly ordinary.

Accordingly, the written sermons of full length, as distinct from the *sententiae*, have proven to be the most transparent glimpse of the monastic theological mind. For the sake of survey, a brief consideration of particular examples from four major monastic orders should suffice as a fair representative of the whole of the major medieval monastic tradition: the Benedictines, Cistercians, Franciscans, and Dominicans. Though each of these orders is essentially different, the clear connection that each held a similar position with regard to the proper exegesis of the Text shall be seen.

The Benedictines, under the *regula* of St. Benedict, were the first of the recognized orders by the papacy that also enjoined the sanction of the State. This fidelity came early, established under Charlemagne, and it is by his contemporary, Alcuin (c. 735-804), that glimpses of monastic theology as influential of the whole of Christendom are made clear. It was been strongly suggested that Alcuin was responsible for the revision of the Church lectionary in the mid eighth century.⁶⁶ Of certain interest to the current course of study, he standardized the lectionary texts to have a particularly Christocentric focus. A survey of Alcuin's revisions of the epistolary readings alone reveal a concern principally with placing the narrative of the soteriological drama at the forefront of each major feast and fast. For Christmas Day he assigns Hebrews 1:1-12, the

⁶⁶There is no original text by Alcuin's hand that attests to this, but there is a manuscript that originated from Chartres Cathedral that claims to be penned based upon his instructions, though it has origins in Rome and likely underwent revisions in Northern Italy. See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 3, The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 193.

reading concerned with the supreme authority and magnificence of the Christ over all creation; on Holy Innocents, Revelation 14:1-5, in which the undefiled martyrs worship the glory of the Lamb; and, on Palm Sunday, Philippians 2:5-11, the kenotic hymn.⁶⁷ These brief glimpses of the epistolary readings alone reveal Alcuin's particular concern that the Church as a whole focused each reading on the reality of the incarnate Christ and, in turn, focused the whole of the Mass upon Him. This, then, was the earliest setting of the medieval sermon, a space in which the days were ordered around a concern with the personhood of Jesus in the texts outside of the Gospel appointed.

Therefore, from Alcuin we consider Peter Damian (c. 1007-1072), who presents a different and yet complimentary perspective. Damian's sermons as collected in the *sermones de sanctis* reveal a particular concern with the place of saints, especially saints that were local in origin.⁶⁸ A study of the text reveals that of the forty-four sermons within the cycle, only six do not concern hagiographic accounts or the days of saints.⁶⁹ The interpretive problem often faced is the presumption that Damian's preoccupation with hagiographic accounts and sermons based upon them means that his Christological focus was marginal at best. However, a survey of the sermons in the cycle reveal a consistent emphasis and return back to the place of the saint as one who glorifies the risen

⁶⁷Compiled from G. Godu, "Epîtres," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, 15 vols. (Paris: Letouzey & Ane, 1907-53), vol 5/1, cols. 304-7.

⁶⁸This is particularly interesting, as Peter Damian thus seems to have been able to avoid the *romanitas* of Charlemagne's saint calendar, such that Damian includes some Roman saints in the series of the *sermones de sanctis*, but more often includes local saints known only in Ravenna.

⁶⁹Two of which concern the Blessed Virgin, one the holy cross, one the discovery of the true cross, one on the Holy Ghost, and one on the nativity of ChriSt. I am indebted to the work of Hughes Oliphant Old, who translated the list in his *Reading and Preaching*, vol 3, *Medieval*, 230-231.

Christ. This is particularly obvious, not in the text alone, but in the artistry of the church with which Damian was acquainted. The mosaics of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna show the saints, local and otherwise, baring palm branches to celebrate and adore the Christ.⁷⁰ Thus, we find both reflected in the art and in Damian's *sermones* a devotion to the saint as revealer of the mystery of Christ. This too may be said of the six sermons in the cycle concerned with the Blessed Virgin, the cross, the nativity, and the Holy Spirit, the whole corpus comprising a decidedly Christocentric narrative in which either the direct word of the sermon is spoken as testament to the personhood of Christ or, the indirect word, by means of exploring the saintly life as it reveals the action of the incarnate Saviour within the world, which accomplishes the same.

Moving away from the Benedictines, we come to the complex Cistercians. An attempt to articulate well Cistercian spirituality, let alone the theological sermon, is a difficult task that has often fallen either too hard to the side of idealism or too hard to the side of polemicizing. Martha Newman's *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* has proven to provide a new tone in medieval studies when it comes to approaching the Cistercian world, one that balances the charitable aspects of the texts with the oft harsh reality of context. Accordingly, I am indebted to her consideration of the Cistercian sermon and their intent, for they were not designed purely for the cloister, but "parables for a monastic audience ... appeared in a Cistercian sermon to the laity as well. The virtues that led to salvation were the same for

⁷⁰See, for instance, the north wall of the nave of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in which the female saints bear palm branches of gold toward the glorified Christ.

prelates, monks, and lay people.”⁷¹ Therefore, the Cistercian sermon does not represent a monastic audience alone, but is part of the spiritual culture of the laity surrounding the cloister, which participates in a unique way by being an intended audience for theological instruction, as opposed to the marginal participation of the laity in most Benedictine communities.⁷²

A survey of the Cistercian order is incomplete without a consideration of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090-1153), arguably one of the most important figures of the medieval period politically, let alone theologically. For the sake of brevity, only a very small portion of his work is considered here, but it should be noted that the selection is, as much as possible, a faithful representation of the whole. To this end, to speak of Bernard is to speak of the preaching of the Second Crusade.⁷³ Though the text of these sermons has been lost, the content of them can be gleaned from some of his correspondence, in which he argues for the crusade from a position of Christocentric authority, exegeting the Scripture as reflective of a call to holy purity, spiritually and

⁷¹Martha Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 161-162.

⁷²The difficulty of the Cistercians, as with all the monastic orders, is the reality of just how political they were. The intent to offer sermons for the laity was as much a political move that concerned geography and land holdings as it did theological principle. This issue in particular is seen through the continual conflicts between the Anglo-Norman Cistercian world and the divided loyalties of Italy and the Papal seat itself. Though this is not the focus of this study, which is concerned with exegesis, Newman’s text provides an excellent exploration of this issue in context, as does Anne E. Lester’s forthcoming *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women’s Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth-century Champagne* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2011).

⁷³See Elizabeth von Schmidt-Pauli, *Bernhard von Clairvaux, Lebensbild* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1953), 327-337.

geographically.⁷⁴ Political motivations aside, it is important to note that the theological imagination of Bernard allowed for a Christocentric focus even when preaching the necessity for holy war.

However, the most significant of Bernard's work that has passed down to us are his literary sermons. Jean Leclercq notes that it was in Bernard's lifetime that the sermon as literary genre became fully realized, such that the texts were written for devotional reading, instead of only recited.⁷⁵ Accordingly, "Bernard never thinks of his audience in the abstract."⁷⁶ But this is not to suggest that knowing his audience created a lack of sincerity in execution; rather, the knowledge of the audience brought with it a particular concern with authenticity in the *ars* of his sermon.⁷⁷ Among Bernard's work, arguably the most significant is his series on the Cantic of Canticles, which number eighty-six in total, but still only comment up to the middle of the third chapter of the text. These sermons, it has been argued, were potentially delivered but were first part of the monastic system of drafting: *dictare*, *transcribere*, and *edere*. Thus, the theological significance of these texts is not found alone in their surface value but in their revision process. These sermons are not expository remarks, but planned discourses with a particular theological

⁷⁴See Michael Gervers *The Second Crusade and the Cistercians* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 91-99 and Thomas F. Madden *The New Concise History of the Crusades* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 52-61.

⁷⁵Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 171-176.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 175.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

logic governing them and being advanced.⁷⁸ Within the sermons on the Canticle of Canticles, Bernard frequently focuses on the allegorical implications of the text, in particular the relationship of the Church as Bride and Christ as Husband, a formula inherited in part from Origen. These sermons hold, not only in their typology but also in their focus, a Christocentric concern regarding the devotional life of the monk. In Sermon VII, Bernard stresses how odd it is that the Bride does not call for the Husband directly: *Verecunde tamen non-ad ipsum sponsum sermonem dirigit, sed ad alios.*⁷⁹ He explains that it is to the holy angels the Bride calls, for upon their approval of the devoted life, the Husband is encouraged to return. Accordingly, Bernard stresses in the section the necessity for vigilance, rebuking the behavior he sees during the morning office: *Doleo proinde aliquos vestrum gravi in sacris vigiliis deprimi somno, nec coeli cives revereri, sed in praesentia principum tanquam mortuos apparere.*⁸⁰ For, he argues, a perpetual lack of fervor shall cause the holy spirits to quit their attendance at the monk's prayers, in turn removing the hope of the Husband's kiss. Sermon VII provides an example of the thematic quality of the sermons on the Canticles as a whole: a focused rhetoric that links private devotion with personal encounter with Christ. His typological reading alone would be evidence enough, but that Bernard so diligently focuses each sermon on the interplay between the believer and Christ, alongside practical direction

⁷⁸See Christopher Holdsworth, "Were the Sermons of St. Bernard on the Song of Songs Ever Preached?" in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, edited by Carolyn Muessig (Boston: Brill, 1998), 295-318.

⁷⁹*Sermo VII, De amore ardenti quo anima diligit Deum. Item de attentione tempore orationis vel Ps.odiae procuranda.*

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

regarding the piety of the hearers, indicates that his exegetical model is commanded by the place of Christ in the Text.

Moreover, this concern is not isolated to the sermons on the Canticles. It is also evidenced in his sermons on Psalm 91 and in particular throughout his festal preaching. One of Bernard's Epiphany sermons is focused not only on the coming of Christ but the reception of Christ: *Ecce pax non promissa, sed missa, non dilata, sed data, non prophetata, sed praesentata*.⁸¹ Christ is come, fully and presently, for the sake of understanding the whole of the cosmos, coinciding with the medieval understanding of *historia* as discussed above. But perhaps the most popular of Bernard's works is also one of the most illustrative of his exegetical focus on Christ as interpreter, *De Diligendo Deo*. Though the whole of the work is concerned with the four levels of love that the soul may ascend through toward a full love of God, the text is marked by frequent rooting in Scripture, notably held in place by the bound and direction of Wisdom. *Hoc vero convivium triplex celebrat Sapientia, et ex una complet charitate, ipsa cibans laborantes, ipsa potans quiescentes, ipsa regnantes inebrians*.⁸² The link of Christ as the wisdom of God coupled with Bernard's placing of Wisdom as the principle exegete that blesses the company of the Bridegroom threefold, illustrates his determination that all proper spiritual discipline, in particular the soul's assent to loving God, be held in the power of Christ both as image of God and revelation of all divine truth.⁸³ This function of wisdom

⁸¹*In Epiphania, Sermo I*

⁸²*De Diligendo Deo*, XI

⁸³1 Cor. 1:24

is the thematic arc of the whole of Bernard's work, concentrated on the place of Christ within the Text as the exegete of the whole, in turn of the whole of existence. It is therefore that Schuck says of Bernard "his watchword was not *Credo ut intelligam*, but *Credo ut experiar*."⁸⁴

Across the pond and to the north, St. Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-1167) brought the devotional life of the Cistercians to the English, including a concern with the Christocentric mystery. Aelred's sermons survive in two forms. The first, the *Sermones inediti*, which are devotional sermons for the Cistercian feast days, including holy days of obligation and regional saints; the second, *De oneribus*, is a collection of thirty-one exegetical comments on Isaiah 13-16. As with Bernard, typological reading and the role of mystery is particularly focused on, however, Aelred's interpretive style strays farther to the side of the mystical than Bernard. In one of his sermons on the Ascension, Aelred gives a typological reading of the ascent of Elijah, a standard interpretive claim since the patristics, but goes further by allegorizing the geographic journey of Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho and across the Jordan as likened to the spiritual journey of the Christian.⁸⁵ Similarly, Aelred adopted extra-biblical models to offer, at times, esoteric devotions, such that he could even be found "enlisting the aid of mathematical figures, perhaps under the influence of Boethius and the school of Chartres."⁸⁶ But what kept Aelred from descent into debates over how many angels could dance on the head of a pin

⁸⁴J. Schuck, *Das Hohelied des hl. Bernhard von Clairvaux* (Paderborn, 1926), 11.

⁸⁵See *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Liturgical Sermons: The First Clairvaux Collection* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2001), 170-210.

⁸⁶Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 202.

was his Christocentric concern even when using extra-biblical texts. In this way, Aelred is a model example of the monastic principle of the redemptive value of all things, particularly the writings of the Greeks and Romans. His *De spirituali amicitia* is owed in no small part to Cicero's *Laelius de amicitia*, adapted to focus exclusively on the place of Christocentric reflection in the gift of true friendship. Thus, Aelred's Christology is the holistic Christology of Bernard, but taken outside of a purely Biblical focus. Instead, he places devotional reflection within the context of the whole of life and, in turn, in the whole of Christ's life. Though it risks at times straying too far in the direction of arcane dialectic, it nonetheless finds its grounding in the personhood of Christ, the principle hold of the Cistercian *Rule*.

Turning from the foundational monastic orders that established and revitalized preaching, it is necessary to consider the two major preaching orders of the medieval period that exemplify two divergent yet complimentary approaches to exegesis.

The Franciscans, or the Order of the Friars Minor, were a mendicant order that changed the role of monastic preaching from concentration in the cloister to external relation; for, "with St. Francis and his followers, the fruits of the experiences of St. Anselm and St. Bernard were brought to the market place, and became the common property of the lay and clerical world alike."⁸⁷ The Franciscans also saw an incorporation of gender in the establishment of the Poor Clares under St. Clare of Assisi, which would have been previously ill-received by some of the Gregorian reformers, but was

⁸⁷Southern, *Making of the Middle Ages*, 240.

nonetheless confirmed by Innocent IV two days before Clare's death.⁸⁸ The focus of the Poor Clares was on cultivated poverty, which Clare herself argued was the principle example of the Gospel. Indeed, the Franciscan ideal was as holistic a following of Christ as possible. Bynum explains,

The early Franciscans, going out as missionaries to the heathen, were intending quite literally to perform the ultimate teaching by example: martyrdom. If living the life of Christ before other men was not enough to bring those men to salvation, then these heathen might themselves assure that the missionaries died before them the death of Christ as the supreme preaching of the gospel.⁸⁹

Accordingly, Franciscan preaching is at once uniquely personal and, at the same time, uniquely Christocentric, as evidence both in the foundational words of St. Francis and in the writings of St. Bonaventure.

What we know of the historical and spiritual St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) is primarily owed to St. Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior*, as well as his *Fioretti*, often called *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, for none of Francis's early sermons have survived, as they were delivered often in expository form and simply, focused on the place of repentance and grace through Christ alone. Bonaventure refers to Francis as likened to John the Baptist, *secundum imitatoriam quoque similitudinem Praecursoris destinatus a Deo*, called to preach selflessly for the sake of others the place of the Cross and to devote the ministry of the friars purely to the providence of God.⁹⁰ What we have of Francis himself comes in the form of his *Rule* for the Friar's Minor under the confirmation of

⁸⁸Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 268-269.

⁸⁹Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 106.

⁹⁰St. Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior*, I.5; c.f. *Fioretti*, XII.3

Honorius III, which takes the form of a traditional *Rule*, as well as additional admonitions. A survey of both illumines the two thematic concerns of Francis: that those in the order holistically follow the way of Christ by deed as much as by word and that in word nothing of the Gospel should be left out. To the first, Francis stresses a simple tension: “It is a great shame for us, servants of God, that while the saints did such things, we wish to receive glory and honor by recounting their deeds.”⁹¹ To the second, Francis points to a simple formula of preaching: *Moneo quoque et exhortor eosdem fratres, ut in praedicatione, quam faciunt, sint examinata et casta eorum eloquia, ad utilitatem et aedificationem populi, annuntiando eis vitia et virtutes, poenam et gloriam cum brevitate sermonis; quia verbum abbreviatum fecit Dominus super.*⁹² In this, Francis became one of the earliest adopters of a holistic spirituality that dictated not only content but also form, such that he saw the role of the Christian to be as likened to Christ as possible, most imperatively in the way preaching was delivered.

In addition to his concern with preaching, Francis also revitalized the tangible personhood of Christ for the Church, chiefly through his consideration of liturgical prayer. His prayers for Passiontide have long gone without a particular title, but Jacques de Schampheler, O.F.M., an exceptional scholar on the life and theology of Francis, has given them the mantle *L’Office de la Pâque*, which seems most fitting for the series of

⁹¹St. Francis of Assisi, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works, The Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. CAP. And Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 29. Interestingly, this theological claim is borrowed from a Cistercian insight, found both in Godfrey the Abbot, *Declarationes ex S. Bernardi Sermonibus* 65 and Blessed Roger the Abbot, *De Sermone Domini in Ultima Cena*, Sermo I.

⁹²St. Francis of Assisi, *Bulla Domini Papae Honorii III super regulam fratrum minorum*, IX.3

appointed readings for each of the monastic hours spanning five seasonal devotions: the Triduum of Holy Week and throughout the year; Easter; Sundays and principal feasts; Advent; and, from Nativity to the Octave of Epiphany. What is most notable in Francis's devotional structure is his focus on Christ as present. A similar message is found in his letter to the entire order, in a somewhat interjected hymn on the sublimity of the Eucharist: "Let the whole of mankind tremble, the whole world shake, and the heavens exult, when Christ, the Son of the living God, is on the altar in the hands of a priest."⁹³ It was this tangible Christ that Francis preached and focused on, along with a simple Gospel of repentance and grace. Christ, for Francis, was thus the human exemplar, the incarnate Man as man could hope to be, retrieving a nearly lost theological tenant of St. Athanasius. Therefore, the exegete of the Scripture and the whole of history was Christ Himself, a form derived from Bernard but manifested in principle by Francis, who transitioned the sermon from the cloister and the laity within its proximity to the lay people's instruction, an embodied faith that moved with the cause of Christ.

From Francis we turn to St. Bonaventure (c. 1217-1274), Francis's biographer and spiritual inheritor, exemplifying the life of the preached word matching the lived deed. Many of Bonaventure's sermons come to us fully transcribed, an impressive quality on its own, made exceptional in that the Franciscan historian J. Guy Bougerol ascribes 736 extant sermons to Bonaventure himself.⁹⁴ Within the collection are nearly three hundred *Sermones de tempore*, about seventy *Sermones de sanctis*, and numerous

⁹³St. Francis, *Francis and Clare*, 58.

⁹⁴J. Guy Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, tands. José de Vinck (Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1964), 145.

lectio continua, including his sermons on the Gospel of St. John and his thoroughly exhaustive, although incomplete, *Hexaemeron*.⁹⁵ A survey of his sermons reveal interesting particulars with regard to Bonaventure, who coupled Franciscan pietism with the emerging scholasticism of the medieval period in Paris.⁹⁶ The first is that Bonaventure's exegesis deviates from that of the patristics with regard to form. He does not combine moral and applicable reading alongside commentary, rather he divides them, preaching on the moral and application in his sermons, commenting on the place of the passage within the whole, in particular the problem of exegesis, in separate, accompanying texts.⁹⁷ To this end, Bonaventure's Christocentric focus was derived twofold: in his express application of texts within his sermon to the daily obligations of the believer and, in turn, his consideration in his commentaries on the place of Christ as the problem and the solution of proper exegesis. This stance is also apparent within his more mystical sermons, such as those that compose the *Hexaemeron*, in which Bonaventure repeatedly refers to Christ as the center of wisdom; the three forms of the Word: uncreated, incarnate, and inspired; and, ultimately how all exegetical models are subservient to their purpose as worship.⁹⁸ Bonaventure's insistence that all preaching, regardless of esoteric allegory or Alexandrian moralization, be found to return to or to come from the place of Christ glorified and worshiped marks his particular exegetical

⁹⁵The *Haxaemeron* was left incomplete after Pope Gregory X summoned Bonaventure to attend the Second Council of Lyon, where he subsequently died after attending four sessions.

⁹⁶See Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, "The Friars," 238-275, in particular 258-264.

⁹⁷See Old, *The Medieval Church*, 364.

⁹⁸See in particular Saint Bonaventure, *Les six jours de la Création*, ed. Marc Ozilou (Paris: Desclée, 1991), III, VIII, IX, XX and XI.

concern, mirroring Francis's own reverence but paired with a Bernardian studious diligence.

But as vast as Bonaventure's sermons are, two texts in particular illumine his devotion to Christocentric exegetical form and the place of personal experience. The first, *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, is Bonaventure's marriage of the liberal disciplines with the theological. Unlike Aelred, however, Bonaventure's scholastic approach was focused on holistic claims with tangible results. The aim was always to return to that mind of Christ that Francis had advocated, such that Bonaventure's philosophical stance is always held in the tension of where worship and reverence may be exemplified, in particular that Scripture is the superior of all revelations and in it the mind must come to rest.⁹⁹ As Bonaventure locates Christ as the center of wisdom, he also locates Christ as the central Word, such that to be resting in the reality of the Scripture is, in turn, to rest in the reality of Christ. This theological contention is further explained in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, wherein the prologue he establishes the classic Bonaventurian theological construct, that without Christ and, in particular, the cross of Christ, there is no hope for inspiration or wisdom of any kind:

*Igitur ad gemitum orationis per Christum crucifixum, per cuius sanguinem purgamur a sordibus vitiorum, primum quidem lectorem invito, ne forte credat quod sibi sufficiat lectio sine unctione, speculatio sine devotione, investigatio sine admiratione, circumscriptio sine exultatione, industria sine pietate, scientia sine caritate, intelligentia sine humilitate, studium, absque divina gratia, speculum absque sapientia divinitus inspirata.*¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹St. Bonaventure, *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, XXVI. In particular: *Et sic patet, quomodo multiformis sapientia Dei, quae lucide traditur in sacra Scriptura, occultatur in omni cognitione et in omni natura.*

¹⁰⁰St. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, I.4.

Pelikan further explains the theological power of the *Itinerarium* as follows:

In Bonaventure, the Augustinian method of introspection within the context of divine grace led, through experience and reflection, to a transcendent Goodness than which nothing better could be imagined, the God whose mercy, made known in Christ, made it possible for one to sound the depths of his own experience and to affirm himself in nature as well as in grace.¹⁰¹

This formula of belief and the place of Christ as the principle beginning and end of Christian reflection places the scholasticism of Bonaventure within the context of his Christocentric exegesis, marking his conception of Franciscan spirituality as both intellectually satisfying and theologically sophisticated while at the same time maintaining the mendicant devotion to the poor and the laity.

In contrast to the Franciscans were the Dominicans, though more properly called *Ordo Praedicatorum*, who did not form out of a response to the crisis of lay piety but in reaction to increasing heterodoxy and schism, most notably from the dualistic and gnostic Cathari. The Dominican *regula* borrowed heavily from the *Rule* of St. Augustine and in constitution owes much to the founding documents of Prémontré, receiving the Papal approval of Honorius III in the winter of 1216, two years after inception.¹⁰² Honorius's charged words in his *Nos attendentes* should not be overlooked—*Nos attendentes fratres Ordinis tui futuros pugiles fidei et vera mundi lumina confirmamus Ordinem tuum*—for they served as a prophecy about the Order that, only a few years later, would be the

¹⁰¹Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval*, 306. It is this particular form of introspection that is transformed in Descartes into a purely authoritative model in which the Self becomes the measure, which shall be discussed more explicitly in the coming pages.

¹⁰²Two bulls exist that claim to be the official recognition of the Order. The first, *Religiosam vitam*, is generally accepted as authentic, while the second, *Nos attendentes*, is suspect. Regardless, the first document makes clear that the *regula* adapted from St. Augustine, as well as the constitutional stipulations are most fitting of those who are to be *pugiles fidei et vera mundi lumina*.

theological arm of the Albigensian Crusade under Innocent III against the Cathari in Languedoc, where the Order would earn their punned nickname, *Domini canes*.¹⁰³ The distinctiveness of this Order, in comparison to the Franciscans, whom Honorius had alternately charged: *catholica paupertatem et humilitatem et sanctum evangelium Domini nostri Jesu Christi, quod firmiter promissimus, observemus*, is notable.¹⁰⁴ Like the Cistercians, from inception the Dominicans were political, even if their politics were aligned with the good of Holy Church.¹⁰⁵ Their exegesis, in turn, serves a political motivation, focused principally on the rejection of heresy, though this does not detract from a Christocentric study, it explains the Dominican concern with rhetoric that was not present in the Franciscan school, except in part in Bonaventure.¹⁰⁶

The founder of the *Domini canes* was St. Dominic (c. 1170-1221) himself, whose life we have copious accounts of but whose preaching is entirely lost.¹⁰⁷ We do not even have the *vita* transcriptions with which to assemble the general principles of form and

¹⁰³See Honorius III, *Nos attendentes*. The pun of *canes* comes from the tradition that Dominic's mother, while pregnant with him, was shown a vision in which a black and white dog with a torch in its mouth roamed the earth. Wherever the dog went, it set fire to the ground. The vision was interpreted as fulfilled when Dominic and his disciples went out, dressed in black and white, "setting fire" to the earth with the Gospel. See Guy Bedouelle, *Saint Dominic: The Grace of the Word* (New York: Ignatius, 1994), I.3.

¹⁰⁴*Solet annuere*, XII.

¹⁰⁵See *The Religious Roles of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities 1150-1300*, ed. Christopher Ryan (New York: Political Institute of Medieval Studies, 1989), especially Michael M. Sheehan, CSB, "Archbishop John Pecham's Perception of the Papacy." See also Christine Caldwell Ames, *Righteous Persecution: Inquisition, Dominicans, and Christianity in the Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁶See Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 281-292.

¹⁰⁷For specifics on the life of Dominic, see Bede Jarrett, *Life of Saint Dominic (1170-1221)* (London: Burns, Oates & Washburne, 1924); Jean de Mailly's *Vie de Dominic*; and, Simon Tugwell's introduction to *Early Dominican Writings*, part of the Classics of Western Spirituality series.

content, as with Francis. The best representation of Dominic and his disciples' preaching is therefore pieced together from inferences made based upon a commission given them by Bishop Folquet de Marselha (also known as Fulk of Toulouse) to make preliminary mission pilgrimages to the Cathari in Languedoc. The text envisions a Dominic concerned with simple catechesis: the Apostle's Creed, *Pater Noster*, the *Ave Maria*, and the Ten Commandments, coupled with a mendicant spirituality reminiscent of the Franciscan *poverello*.¹⁰⁸ But because the Dominic was responding to heresy and not to the lack of lay piety, his approach was by nature different than Francis. This simplified catechesis, then, cannot be dismissed as simple doctrine but foundational remediation to correct the heterodox Cathari. It was from this concern with right doctrine that the *Ordo Praedicatorum* became known for their particular devotion to preaching as a form of worship with an explicitly Christocentric focus. Though it cannot be purely asserted from Dominic alone, considering how many of his words are lost to us, it may be inferred from his legacy.

After Dominic, Guillaume de Peyraut (c. 1190-1271) helped establish a formula of a preaching dogmatic first in his *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*, but it was Humbert of Romans (c. 1194-1277) whose *De eruditione praedicatorum* provides one of the earliest medieval texts that both explains preaching as a disciplined art to be learned and as a central, necessary part of the life of the Church. Composed near the end of his life, Humbert's *De eruditione* is divided into two books: the first, composed of forty-five chapters, which focus on the personal qualities of the preacher as well as the means of

¹⁰⁸See Laurent, *Monumenta historica S. Dominici*, (Paris: 1933), vol. 15, 60-65.

developing a good sermon; the second, a collection of one hundred *exempla*, sermons for all sorts of occasions and listeners.¹⁰⁹ Brett has noted that while the text provides a brilliant glimpse into Dominican preaching philosophy and was certainly imperative in the shaping of the Order and their view of exegetical form, it is also a remarkable reflection of Dominican holistic spirituality. Indeed, “more than any other orthodox element of society, [they] championed the cause of the downtrodden, and although they failed to bring about the wholesale amelioration of mankind, only the most myopic could deny that they did, at least to some extent, improve the condition of the poor.”¹¹⁰ Accordingly, a survey of Humbert’s *exempla* reveals sermons that are consistently grounded in the theme of Christ as present with the poor and the whole of the Scripture as being testament to the *poverello* spirit, though uniquely Dominican in its concern for doctrine, as opposed to the Franciscan concern of piety. This is evidenced in the early pages of the *De eruditione*, in which Humbert declares, “Preachers are also called soldiers of Christ.”¹¹¹ Here, the political position of the Dominicans is central.

¹⁰⁹See Edward Tracy Brett, *Humbert of Romans: His Life and Views of Thirteenth-Century Society*, (New York: Political Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), 153-166. These *exempla* must be distinguished from the *sententiae*. The latter were particular sayings recorded either in response or in reflection based upon the words of the patristic or presiding preacher of the time. The *exempla* were undelivered sermons, skeletal models that could serve as starting points or suggestions for proper sermons to correspond to the need for what came to be known as the “occasional sermon,” or those given outside of the cloister and not within the context of speaking against heresy. Rather, *exempla* became increasingly popular as preaching itself became particularly significant in the life of the Church. These *exempla* of Humbert are, additionally, removed from the scholastic fervor that other preaching manuals take in the following century. Compare, for instance, with the 1346 *Ars componendi sermones*, penned by the Benedictine monk, Ranulph Higden in the north of England, which is markedly influenced by the Ciceronian *dispositio*.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 166. Evidence of this influence may be seen on in the life of King Louis IX, whose charity is a reflection of Dominican influence in the regnum.

¹¹¹Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione praedicatorum*, I.3.

Dominican Christology was born out of a measure of defense, exegeting for the sake of preserving orthodox Faith, which by nature both pointed back and emerged from the incarnated Christ. Therefore, the division of the Franciscan and Dominican approaches to preaching both in purpose and form do not negate their compliment in content, which was affirming not only the centrality of Christ but also the thirteenth century concern with Christ as enfleshed, that is, the Christ who suffered, the Christ crucified who could be experienced in daily devotion.¹¹²

Though the above provides a brief overview of the sermon forms of the four major monastic orders from the early to the late Middle Ages and the place of preaching in the cloister, the survey would be remiss to not mention the place of the cathedral schools and scholasticism at least in part. Since the study at hand is principally concerned with the role of exegesis, the following shall only briefly consider a handful of major figures that coincided with the developments taking place in the monasteries.¹¹³

Among the scholastics, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) stands as a complicated theological example but a necessary rhetorical one. Abelard's *Logica ingredientibus* and *Sic et Non*, when considered outside of their theological difficulties, reveal the burgeoning role that rhetoric had within the schools that it had previously only enjoyed as

¹¹²See Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Preaching the Cross: Liturgy and Crusade Propaganda" in *Medieval Sermon Studies* (Hull: Maney Publishing, 2010), vol. 53, 2009, 11-32. See also Siegfried Wenzel's "Monastic Preaching in the Age of Chaucer" (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1993).

¹¹³Though Peter Lombard's *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum* were essential to the medieval theological imagination and the development of rhetorical device, they are not addressed here directly as, firstly, many of the works observed here, while owing some credit to the *Sententiarum* can stand alone; secondly, the focus of this section for the sake of survey has been confined as much as possible to the role of the sermon, such that an evaluation of Lombard's theological device, while interesting and important for the formation of the scholastic thinkers, does not explicitly provide a link for the Christological concern at hand. See Southern, *Making of the Middle Ages*, 205-208.

harmonic discipline in the monastery. In the school, the logic of a doctrine became the veracity of it, such that Geoffery, when he compared his training under Abelard with that of St. Bernard, pointed principally to Abelard's disregard of the redemptive work of the crucifixion in favor of a Christ whose death was a rhetorical device, whereas Bernard offered the rhetoric in tandem with the overwhelming love of God.¹¹⁴ But what Abelard lacked in theological orthodoxy he cloaked in brilliant rhetoric, and it is this skill that inspired the practice of the doctrinal sermon within the cathedral schools—beyond the cautioned genius that had been inherited through Fulbert—favoring the new form of preaching that, oft to its peril, was wont to rely too heavily on rhetorical over Scriptural device.¹¹⁵

From Abelard we must consider Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096-1191), whose extensive mystical theology, while impressive, cannot be the focus of our current course. Instead, we must look to Hugh as the remarkable anomaly in medieval thought, in that he returned to the significance of the literal sense of Scripture, abandoning the exegetical *forma* of Gregory the Great for a particularly Augustinian construct of exegesis, set forth originally in *De doctrina christiana*, that all knowledge, not the least of which included

¹¹⁴See Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, 38.

¹¹⁵On the foundational role of Fulbert, see Southern's *Making of the Middle Ages*, 197-204. With regard to the issue of the Abelardian sermon, the orthodox and rhetoric dichotomy is made particularly clear upon reviewing his sermons on Pentecost, *Sermo* XVIII on the day, and XIX, XX, XXI, and XXII on the days following. While Abelard struggles within them to make a substantive doctrinal claim about the Holy Ghost that aligns with the orthodox holdings—such as those he borrows from Boethius in his *Sic et Non*—he does achieve a rhetorical strategy by way of the three-point structural form. Where this deviates from the Dominican form of the later century is in Abelard's fascination with the rhetorical device to what is only the neglect of the content of his actual message. The result is a rhetorical brilliance of potentially heterodox statements, littered with occasions of orthodoxy but, on the whole, seeming to be more concerned with conveying the skill of the orator than the erudition of his remarks.

geographic, grammatical, scientific, or principally secular elements, could be placed in the service of Christ. It was in Hugh that the Augustinian school was revived and, in no small part, the foundations for the Aristotelian principles taken up by St. Thomas Aquinas were laid.¹¹⁶

A student of Hugh, Richard of St. Victor (c. 1100-1173) is notable for our purposes in that his *Sermones centum* contain some of the earliest examples of scholastic preaching, most notably the theological sensitivity to numerology in the three point sermon. A survey of Hugh's *centum* reveals a Christocentric focus that is distilled into scholastic principle, particularly the place and role of the proof text. In Richard, each sub-point is bolstered by a direct Scriptural quote. Unlike Bernard and others, who quoted Scripture by virtue of consistent emersion, Richard quotes consciously for the purpose of proving his argument.¹¹⁷ This, too, is a method of preaching that proves significant for Aquinas, but it is also notable as a distinguishing feature in the context of the cathedral school, whereas it would have been considered an oddity in the cloister.¹¹⁸

Ultimately, to speak of the scholastics is to speak of St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), and the immediate association is his *Summa theologica*. For our purposes, however, our attention must be to his sermons, though we have relatively few of them and they are, on the whole, *reportationes* made by a secretary and not from Thomas's

¹¹⁶See Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 83-106. Hugh, it should be noted, is also free of some of the pseudo-Augustinian controversy, having relied principally on texts long confirmed as being authentic.

¹¹⁷This is most notable in *Sermo XXXVI* and in the triptic form of *Sermo I*, *II*, and *III*. This, imperatively, is opposed to the Abelardian three-point approach both in the place of Scripture and in the concern of form by means of content and not content by means of form.

¹¹⁸See Southern, *Making of the Middle Ages*, 170-217 and Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, 196-263.

own hand. Within the corpus, one collection is of a sermon cycle of fifteen orations that explore the content of the Apostles' Creed. Unlike Dominic's creedal focus, which we infer was on the necessity for orthodoxy and provided a simple remediation of the Faith, Thomas's approach is an expositional reasoning of the Creed itself. Accordingly, it is fascinating that his rhetorical approach should open with a focus on the place of Faith as principle: *Primum quod est neccessarium christiano cuilibet est fides sine qua nullus dicitur uere christianus*.¹¹⁹ Unlike Abelard, who had risked content for the sake of form, Thomas reconciled the form with the content, such that his sermons present the same care for the Scripture and for sound argument as his *Summa*. Notable, too, is that unlike the *Summa*, he makes frequent use throughout the sermons of illustrations, some from *Legenda aurea*, but many original, explaining elements of the Holy Trinity, the incarnation, and other complex theological topics through the form of illustration, even parable. Though the form we have presents them vaguely, we can infer that Thomas's attention to the care of his explanation reflects the Christocentric focus of his sermons, that beginning with *credo* he draws on the place of faith as principle and quickly brings its necessity into the context of the personhood of Christ. Though his sermons employ the Aristotelian rhetoric famous throughout his work, his care for the Text shines through, clearly seen by the careful account of each Scriptural reference, such that of all the mediaeval theologians, it may be rightly said that Aquinas is the most faithfully

¹¹⁹Latin text taken from Nicholas Ayo's exceptional *The Sermon-Conferences of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Apostles' Creed*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

Augustinian in the assertion that concerning *sacra doctrina, scriptura scripturam interpretatur*.

Though outside of the scholastics proper, a word should be said about Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) and the incorporation of the scientific tradition as isolated discipline into the form of exegesis. Like Aelred of Rievaulx's incorporation of mathematical harmonics in his mystical theology, Nicholas advocated an old approach to faith, *visio sine comprehensione, speculatio*, but as *coincidentia oppositorum*, pairing a more empirical speculation of nature and mathematical form with the mystery of Faith.¹²⁰ But this pairing comes not in the service of the cathedral schools in isolation, but as a form of theological diplomacy. Nicholas ministered under three remarkable Renaissance Popes—Eugene IV, Nicholas V, and Pius II—and used his sermons in broad measure, akin to the *centum* of Humbert, at times preaching the preservation of orthodoxy in support of the campaign of Pius II against the Turks and, in the same cycle, presenting sophisticated scientific expositions about the mystical nature of entering into unknowing.¹²¹ Of importance to our current study would be a sermon such as Nicholas's sermon for Easter day in 1432. While the text is naturally Christocentric, it presents a fascinating example of late scholasticism coupled with Germanic pietism: Nicholas

¹²⁰Nicholas first makes explicit reference to this in *De docta ignorantia* I.26, but it is drawn from previous writings such as St. Augustine's *Epistat ad probam* and Pseudo-Dionysius's *De mystical theologie*.

¹²¹It is unfair to present Nicholas and orthodoxy without recognizing the potential struggle presented by his late work, *De pace fidei*, in which he imagines a sort of summit in Heaven where Christians, Jews, and Muslims reconcile their faiths. While he maintains that Christianity is the closest to the True, he vaguely implies a form of reconciliation between the religions, perhaps bolstered when taken in turn with his *Cribratio Alchorani*, in which he speculates on the moralistic truth to be found in the Koran and acknowledges without polemic the value of Jewish and Islamic faith.

produces an imagined dialogue of nearly four pages that serves as an interview of Mary Magdalene and her feelings as she witnessed the Passion.¹²² This is in contrast to the devotional stories of the *Legenda aurea*, as Nicholas produces himself with the clear intent, for he explicitly references it, to inspire devotion. The use of narrative is not unique to Nicholas, but it exemplifies a rarity in medieval sermons both outside of the cloister and the school, one that becomes important in the development of the modern perspective of the place of story, fact, and truth.

Having explored the role of the sermon both within the cloister and in the place beyond it, we turn at last to two remaining and important literary genres in medieval monastic history, letter writing and *florilegia*.

To begin with, it is important to understand that the process of writing a letter in the monastery was a significant labor and came at some cost. The words used to describe the process, the paper, and the labor—*cudere*, *exarare*—indicate that the method of forming a letter was understood as a task that required discipline and care.¹²³ Too, letters were rarely composed in secret. The *scriptorium* of a monastery was by nature a public space and, accordingly, the production of any sort of writing was subject to the review of those assembled there. Indeed, “the writer of a letter took great pains with it because he knew it would be brought to the attention of a more or less extensive audience;” and, “the writer will tell his correspondent things that both already know; he is taking into

¹²²*Sermo XII*.

¹²³See Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 177.

consideration the fact that others will read what he has written.”¹²⁴ It is thanks to many of the surviving letters that we have a perspective on the monastic life beyond the codification gleaned by the differing *regula*. On the surface, it seems that there is nothing more to be gained from such works, but the Carolingian period saw a renewed perspective on the *modus epistolaris* and favored it as a form of political, philosophical, and even exegetical short treatise.¹²⁵ This detail reaffirms much of what was stated above, that the medieval view of exegesis, even when in the hands of novices composing letters, was by nature conversational. What was written was subject to critique, reflection, and evaluation, such that no theological stance was held in isolation, but by nature was communal both in the physical reality of the monastic life and in the spiritual nature of the discipline.

Thus at last, we turn to the *florilegia*, which stand as a unique, transitional space between the theology of the community and the theology of the individual. The *florilegium* was not, as opposed to many of the literary forms above, a unique genre of the period, but was inherited as a method of didactic preservation from the Greeks and Romans.¹²⁶ They served as written and copied collections of a monk’s favorite passages of Scripture or exegesis to enjoy in private devotion, as well as to be shared often in the *collatio*, sometimes even intended from inception to be distributed, as Rochais notes is

¹²⁴Ibid., 178.

¹²⁵For a perspective on the evolution of the medieval epistolary tradition, see Heinz-Jürgen Beyer, *Die Frühphase der “Ars dictandi”*, in *Studi Medievali* 18, 1977, 19-43. For a particular study of this phenomenon, see Wojciech Falkowski, “The Letter of Bruno of Querfurt to King Henry II” in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* (2009), ed. Gerd Aithoff (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 417-438.

¹²⁶See H. Rochais, “Contribution à l’histoire des florilèges ascétiques du moyen âge,” *Revue bénédictine*, 1953, vol. 63, 246-291.

evidenced in Defensor, Alcuin, and Smaragdus.¹²⁷ The *florilegia* served a simple but imperative role: *His carpat flores, quis depingat sibi mores*, and as such function not only to further illumine for us the communal spirituality of the cloister but also to point to the intent, even in private devotion, for them to be means of furthering the spiritual life as it would ultimately be in its relation to a community.¹²⁸ Leclercq notes the variety of primary texts transmitted to *florilegia*: “excerpts from St. Gregory the Great were very numerous, beyond any doubt the most numerous of all, because the Gregorian texts were eminently conducive to contemplative prayer. But collections were also made of texts by St. Jerome, St. Anthony, St. Nilus, and St. Isidore.”¹²⁹ There is no consistent structure to the texts, as they often flow from the transcribed *lectio* to the individual’s *meditatio* without pause or regard to a specific or formal style. These compilations, then, serve as one of the most transparent pictures of an individual monk’s spirituality, whether there was intent for audience or not. But to have a proper sense of what made the *florilegia* at once a continuation of the theological conversation within the cloister and, in turn, a dialogue with the past, we must consider an example, such as that found in the writings of Jean of Fécamp (c. 990-1078). Jean’s appreciation and close devotion to the patristic authors and his own desire to faithfully engage them renders little books of prayer that blur the lines between his words and theirs. *Florilegia* had evolved to be less concerned

¹²⁷Ibid., 264.

¹²⁸This inscription is found as the preface to the *Testimonia de libris Gregorii magni* attributed to Paterius in the tenth century.

¹²⁹Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 183.

with citing a specific author, such that Jean himself prefaces, *Dicta mea, dicta Patrum*.¹³⁰ As such, *traditio* in the utmost sense was observed. Leclercq notes that generations of contemplatives copied and recopied the *florilegia*, such that authorship was cast aside and the raw meat of the theological illumination was left over.¹³¹ As such, the monk as an individual maintained a spirituality that was, indeed, personal and significant, but was never far from the broad conversation of the cloister and the counsels of old.

But the world was changing, and the private but public theology of the cloister shifted in the breath before the fourteenth century. Perhaps it best, here, to return our reflection to Bonaventure, in whom, as Pelikan notes,

the Augustinian method of introspection within the context of divine grace led, through experience and reflection, to a transcendent Goodness than which nothing better could be imagined, the God whose mercy, made known in Christ, made it possible for one to sound the depths of his own experience and to affirm himself in nature as well as in grace.¹³²

Yet the shifting time brought with it new thought, as Pelikan goes on:

In Descartes, on the other hand ... *cogito* led through doubt to thought and from thought to affirmation of both the self and of God. ... Cartesian method of philosophy by introspection did not stand or fall with the truth-claims of Christian faith, but increasingly compelled such truth-claims to justify themselves, if they could, by its canons.¹³³

The world of theological imagination was no longer conversation or even debate, but the war of the self against the extent of the self's desire to believe.

¹³⁰H. Rochais, "Contribution à l'histoire", 260.

¹³¹Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 184.

¹³²Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval*, 306.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 307.

Conclusion

Before proceeding, it is necessary to conclude this chapter with a brief summary of terms. *Context* as I have used it throughout this work refers not to an approach of historical criticism but the literary context of the passages themselves. Paul's quotation of Isaiah, for instance, does not exist in a void. It serves a specific literary purpose made available by a holistic reading of the Scripture, which is a nod to canonical criticism. Too, my use of the word *subversion* with regard to the parables is not about a kind of literary subversion but nuanced, political subversion. One thing is said while another is understood. The parables make positive arguments but, underscoring those arguments, negative implications are present. To speak of reward, for instance, is to also speak of punishment.

Let us turn, now, to the experiment in exegesis itself. Having gleaned principles from the patristic and medieval theological imagination, I begin by exploring two parables concerning with eschatology and the place of Christ as our example and judge.

CHAPTER TWO

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Marriage Feasts and the Eschaton

Introduction

In this chapter, I shall consider two of the parables of marriage found in the Gospels, in particular the Gospel of St. Matthew: the parable of the king's marriage feast for his son and the parable of ten virgins. Three issues must be addressed before proper consideration of the selected parables may proceed.

First, the characteristic of Matthew's narrative, namely, that they were offered with a Jewish audience in mind, is significant for the language of these parables, which rely heavily both on affirming orthodox imagery as well as contradicting it: on the one hand, the Jewish tradition that the timing of the Messiah's coming coinciding with the hour of the Passover is used literarily to progress the parable of the ten virgins; on the other hand, the exclusivism of the chosen people is changed by the inclusion of the Gentile wanderers on the highways, in the parable of the marriage feast.

Moreover, the two parables lend themselves to being interpreted from the perspective of nuptial mysticism. The husband Christ is wed to his *sponsa*, the Church, in a mystical union, perhaps no more eloquently described than by St. Bernard of Clairvaux in his *De amore dei*. Indeed, Scripture itself, both in the Old and New Testament, uses this imagery. God frequently employs marital imagery when he addresses Israel's sin, characterizing it as an act of adultery when they worship false

gods: “Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers.”¹ Illustrating this image directly, God commands Hosea to take a whore for his wife and to return to her despite her unfaithfulness, thereby illustrating the Lord’s commitment to His adulterous people. St. Paul, as well, compares the union of a husband and wife to Christ and the Church, in that the wife submits as the Church does to Christ and the husband loves even to the point of excruciating self-sacrifice, as Christ for the Church.² The implications of this nuptial imagery are explored in detail below.

Finally, though both of the parables chosen use images of a wedding feast to communicate by sign the return of Christ, they do not focus on the same events in relation to the eschaton. It is prudent for us to consider that the vision given to John by which he recounted the Apocalypse consists of several distinct events, so while one parable may refer to the coming of the Lord, it does not necessarily refer to the Lord’s judgment. We shall see in these two parables that such distinction becomes particularly significant in our understanding of the structure of Matthew as a whole.

These things in mind, we are free to proceed accordingly.

The Parable of the King’s Marriage Feast

The first parable to be considered is that of the marriage feast found in the twenty-second chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

¹Jer. 3:1

²Eph. 5:22-33

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.³

A cursory reading of the parable lends it to being placed alongside the nearly identical story found in the Gospel of St. Luke in the fourteenth chapter, but a careful comparison of the two passages reveals key differences, both minute and significant. The account in Matthew specifies that the meal was a marriage feast to be given at midday, whereas the account in Luke is specific in identifying the feast as a dinner.⁴ Moreover, the account in Matthew features a guest who, being found unworthy, is cast out of the feast altogether, whereas the account in Luke does not feature this detail. Accordingly, St. Augustine concludes that “the Holy Scriptures teach us that there are two feasts of the Lord: one to which the good and evil come, [that is, the feast in Matthew] the other to which the evil

³Matt. 22:1-14

⁴See Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies* 38.1, PL 76:1282-1283

do not come [that is, the feast in Luke].”⁵ In harmony with Augustine, I venture that the passage in Matthew identifies the present reality of the kingdom of God, wherein the saint and sinner are invited with equity to the table of the Lord, but that the passage in Luke looks to the eschatological end of the age, where the final judgment renders the marriage feast of the Lamb exclusively for those united in Him. Indeed, Gregory the Great reflected, “From Matthew we can infer that in this passage the marriage feast represents the church of the present time.”⁶ I proceed then with a view to placing this parable in relation to the present state of the Church and in consideration of her service as handmaiden to the Lord.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

Now the king is God the Father, who has given the Church in marriage to His Son through the mystery of the Cross, in that the Son quit the womb of the Virgin to be made manifest for the sake of all men, as the Psalmist sings, “In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber.”⁷ As I have considered above, the kingdom of heaven here is that kingdom of the present age, the kingdom in which the Church is the handmaiden of the Lord being united to the bridegroom. It is for this that the king has made a marriage, so that the word of the prophet might be fulfilled: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and

⁵See St. Augustine, *Sermon* 90.1, PL 38:559

⁶See Gregory the Great, *Forty* 38.1, PL 76:1282

⁷Ps. 19:4-5

bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”⁸ For it is to redeem the tarnished image within Man that our Lord came, as St. Athanasius was given to write,

It was not right that [God] should permit men to be destroyed by corruption, because this was neither proper nor fitting for the goodness of God ... [such that] he, the Word of the Father and above everyone, consequently he alone was both able to recreate the universe and be worthy to suffer for all and to be an advocate on behalf of all before the Father.⁹

And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

The servants are the prophets of God under the old covenant, who brought forth the word of the Lord to the people of Israel. For “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,” and “To [Christ] give all the prophets witness;” and who were those bidden to come but the covenant people descended from Abraham, by whom “shall all families of the earth be blessed?”¹⁰ Yet they did not heed the words of the prophets sent to them, so that it was said that they were a “people ... without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not.”¹¹ As the author of the *Opus imperfectum* writes, “the prophets—went out to call people to the wedding of the coming groom, that is, to call people to faith in Christ, as the prophets prophesied about him to them. But they did not come.”¹²

⁸Isa. 7:14

⁹Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 6-7, 149-151.

¹⁰Heb. 1:1, Acts 10:43, Gen. 12:3

¹¹Jer. 5:21

¹²*Opus imperfectum* 325

Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

But as God is a God of great patience, for “the Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy,” and He “is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,” He sent His servants again to call the guests to the marriage feast.¹³ And who were these servants sent out for a second time? Again, these are the prophets, but the faithful apostles now join them, for our Lord teaches of two resurrections. Concerning the first He says, “the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live,” which we understand to be the resurrection of the soul who, having heard the call of God made through His Word, professes Christ as Lord, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”¹⁴ And how did the dead hear unless the apostles and all the faithful spoke to them, as Peter declares, “We are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”¹⁵

And to what should the oxen and fatlings be compared but to the great wealth of the heavenly Father, who offers the best of all His creation to His children? For our Lord said, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask

¹³Ps. 145:8, 2 Pet. 3:9

¹⁴John 5:25, Rom. 10:13

¹⁵Acts 5:32

him?”¹⁶ And what is the wealth of the Father but the great story of His salvation of Man and His bringing Man into harmony with Himself, such that Gregory the Great wrote, “What do we take the oxen and fattened animals to be but the fathers of the Old and New Testaments?”¹⁷ We then see how God patiently awaited the return of His people, giving them the choicest of His storehouse and the best of His table and waits still, for the time of the first resurrection is still at hand.

But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

Turning from the words of the prophets and the apostles, the invited guests looked to their fields and to their business. The former concerned himself with producing earthly gain by his own hands, that is to say by means of the farm; the latter concerned himself with producing earthly gain by another’s hands, that is to say by means of merchandise. Those who rejected the call of God made by the appeal of the prophets and the apostles—but did not shame or murder them—were concerned with the riches only offered by the world, to the point they excluded God. Therefore, the scribe also says, “the act of maintaining a farm is not a sin, but you make it to be a sin by preferring it to God.”¹⁸

¹⁶Luke 11:13

¹⁷PL 76:1283

¹⁸*Opus* 325

And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

Even still, there are those who do not merely reject the graciousness of the feast and instead revile the blessed character of the messenger who brings the invitation.¹⁹ For the Lord says in His anger, “They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.”²⁰ Moreover, Jerome reflects, “Contempt for the marriage is shown by the killing of the servants.”²¹ The reason the marriage is so hated is because the incarnation itself, for which the marriage stands, is a scandal. The apostle writes, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block.”²² For the Jews, the scandal was the One God being at once incarnate and at once eternally other. Therefore, the messengers who invited the intended guests were loathed to the point of brutal death and their blood, like Abel’s, such that God should ask, “What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground” and the slain cry, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”²³

¹⁹Jerome, 249

²⁰Amos 5:10

²¹Jerome, 249

²²1 Cor. 1:23

²³Gen. 4:10, Apoc. 6:10

But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

For as the Lord had said through the prophet Jeremiah,

Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as at this day,

so too the King kindles his anger against those who denied His good word through His servants and laid waste to their habitations.²⁴ Here the meaning is broad. It could be said in a literal way that this speaks of “Vespasian and Titus, who killed the people of Judea and set fire to the sinful city.”²⁵ Still, it could be spoken in accord with the psalmist, that “He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them,” wherefore it may speak of those cities like Sodom that God poured His wrath upon when none were found to be repentant.²⁶ Even still, it could be an ultimate claim. Whereas the parable temporally refers to the present age, it nonetheless anticipates the eschatological end of those who slay the messengers of the King and refuse His table, their cities set on fire for “not only their souls but even their bodies are tormented by the eternal flames of hell.”²⁷ Indeed, it is perhaps best to assert

²⁴Jer. 44:4-6

²⁵Jerome, 249

²⁶Ps. 78:49

²⁷Gregory the Great, PL 76:1285

the verse lends itself to a reading in which all senses might be said to be true, concerned with literal and metaphorical meanings present, past, and future.

Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

When the Jews did not accept the word given to them through the prophets and the apostles, God opened the invitation to the Gentiles. For it is written, “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.”²⁸ And again, “It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”²⁹ And it was for this that Christ said, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”³⁰

²⁸Isa. 11:10

²⁹Isa. 49:6

³⁰John 10:16

So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

However, a question may arise as to why as many as could be found among the Gentiles should have been invited to the feast. After all, if the feast is for the celebration of the people of God, should not those found doing evil or acting in spite of God not be invited? For the apostle writes, “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves.”³¹ Therefore, Jerome writes, “Among the pagans too there is an infinite diversity. For we know some are inclined to vices and rush off toward evils, but others for the sake of integrity of character devote themselves to the virtues.”³² Therefore, it would seem fitting for the messengers to seek out those of character among the Gentiles, who exemplify pagan virtue. Nonetheless, to the question of fittingness, it should be considered that the language of the First Epistle of John leaves a broad door open: “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”³³ Additionally, the Angelic Doctor writes, “God predestines the salvation of anyone to be brought about by the prayers of others;” and, later still, “On account of the union of charity, what is vouchsafed to all ought to be accounted his own by each one.”³⁴ Therefore, it should be understood that since the parable expounds on the present age of the Church and God, who is inclined to show mercy to all, the invitation extended to all

³¹Rom. 2:14

³²Jerome, 250

³³1 John 2:2

³⁴Aquinas, III.1.3.[4], III.4co

that could be found was in accordance with the great hope that many might come to belief, regardless of their current affections. For there is a knowing that comes from reason and a knowing that comes from revelation, the latter the messengers brought on their lips through the power of the Holy Spirit, as Christ said, “For it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”³⁵

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

We must first consider the chronology of the narrative. We have previously understood this parable to be an analogue of the Church in the present age; therefore, we understand why the King should not be present when the guests first arrive. He awaits the appointed time of which it is said, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”³⁶ It is because of this that the parable is also unclear concerning the moment in time this event takes places. The supposition of the parable is that this coming of the King shall happen, for it is phrased as an expected event, but it is also phrased without temporal reference between the furnishing of the wedding with the guests and the King’s arrival. We take this, then, to be a reference to

³⁵Matt. 10:19-20

³⁶Matt. 24:36

the last judgment, as Jerome writes, “On the day of judgment he visits the guests who were resting.”³⁷

Moreover, it is prudent we note that the servants of the King have not seemed to notice that the guest is dressed inappropriately. We understand this to carry the gravity of the words of our Lord,

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.³⁸

It is both for the Lord to judge and for the Lord to see, for “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” and yet on the last day, the King shall divide the false from the true. It is prudent then to discern wisely and with care, for not all present at the feast belong there, but it is only the King who is able to identify those without the proper attire. As Gregory the Great reasons, if reception into the feast is the reception into the Church, by “baptism or faith,” we understand the guest not to lack what seems necessary for his belonging. Nonetheless, the King shall cast him out. What is needed as garment must then be something more than the fundamental means by which we enter Holy Church. Rather, the garments required are those of charity, the clothing of the righteous to whom it was written: “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”³⁹ It is thus

³⁷Jerome, 250

³⁸Matt. 7:21-23

³⁹Jas. 1:3-4

that we must take care, for it appears that the waters of baptism do not confer a grace that preserves the soul unto eternity, but that it is the integrity of the conversion worked out in the course of a life and evidenced by the garments of righteousness that keep us and confirm us in everlasting life.

Likewise, the man was speechless. For as those who shall call to the Lord on the last day, claiming to have striven for His cause and sake, so too this man is unaware that he seeks to deceive by embracing a different gospel, by having the vocabulary by which to be present at the feast but without the clothing of righteousness to remain. And how should he have been clothed? “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”⁴⁰ And, again, by the words of St. Bede, “He alone loves the Creator perfectly who manifests a pure love for his neighbor.”⁴¹

Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We have previously understood the chronological place of this parable as concerned with the age of the present Church until the King arrives to bring judgment, which we understand furthermore to refer to the last days. The King does not have the guest taken out of the feast and killed, which is significant. The preservation of the guest’s body points to the truth of the resurrection, where “they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of

⁴⁰John 13:35

⁴¹Martin H. Manser, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2001), 257.

damnation.”⁴² Interestingly, the parable proceeds a passage in the Gospel where Jesus speaks to the issue of resurrection directly in Matthew 22:23-33. In damnation, a twofold sentence occurs: the hands and feet are bound, which “puts a check on all their activity;” moreover, we see the torment apparent from his weeping and the gnashing of his teeth, which signify by metaphor the total agony of the damned, the whole of a person separated from God to suffer most horribly.⁴³

For many are called, but few are chosen.

The reason for this is simple, in that the Gospel is not concerned exclusively with the initiation of man into a meeting with God but with the total reconciliation of the person unto the Creator. As Aquinas writes of the Incarnation, “To be united to God in unity of person was not fitting to human flesh, according to its natural endowments, since it was above its dignity; nevertheless, it was fitting that God, by reason of His infinite goodness, should unite it to Himself for man’s salvation.”⁴⁴ The Incarnation was for the sake of man’s unification with the Creator. To this end, though many may receive the invitation to this union, it is often rejected, evidenced by a fruitless conversion.

⁴²John 5:29

⁴³MKGK 38.

⁴⁴Aquinas, 3a.1.2

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

The second parable to be considered is found later on in the same Gospel, in the twenty-fifth chapter:

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.⁴⁵

It is only in the Gospel of Matthew that this parable is found; particularly, it is found after the previously considered parable, which is important for our purposes in what it speaks to with regard to timing. Whereas the marriage feast the king threw for his son is understood to be a reference to that time immediately before the final judgment of our Lord—with a quick but imperative reference to it by the parable's close—this parable is chiefly concerned with the Saviour's justice. We know this both by the internal mechanism of the parable and its surrounding context, for what immediately proceeds in the Scripture is a detailed but obscure account of the return of Christ. The parable presupposes our understanding of His return, thereby advancing a mysterious claim as to what we must expect upon His coming in glory.

⁴⁵Matt. 25:1-13

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

Again the kingdom of heaven is compared to a coming wedding feast, such as the parable proceeding. However, now the emphasis is not on the agency of the bridegroom but of those who wait to meet Him. Before, the focus on the power and authority of the King was to teach us the absoluteness of God's authority. In this parable, we understand the concern to be with our own actions in response to anticipating His return.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

We are told from the beginning of the parable that five of the virgins are wise and the other five are foolish, that is, they represent to us the two divisions of persons in the world who shall be found—even within the Church—on the great and terrible Day of the Lord.⁴⁶ The difference between them, then, is only discerned by the presence of oil in their lamps.⁴⁷ But a further reading might be made, that the number of man has been called five and so too does man have five senses, so that it could be said that the parable is about two souls presented on the day of judgment, as the prophetic words previous have all referred to souls in pairs, one taken and one left.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Hilary of Poitiers, SC 258:204

⁴⁷Augustine, PL 38:575

⁴⁸Matt. 24:40-41 “Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”

They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

What divides the foolish from the wise is the oil they take with them to await the bridegroom and his party. What, then, is this oil? The oil is the purposeful and active life of the follower of Christ. For by the Scripture we know, “Thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”⁴⁹ The Lord anoints His servant in the midst of his work, as he follows both in the pasture and in the valley of the shadow. This is the life of a Christian lived in service to God: continuing in ever-faithful service. For it was by oil that miracles were performed, as the Scripture says, “And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.”⁵⁰ Moreover, it was by oil our Lord was worshiped by those He came to save:

And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.⁵¹

We see that oil is used both to administer the gifts of God and to worship God, the active and contemplative lives realized together in harmony. Therefore, when oil is used in the parable, we understand that it is the oil of a righteous soul that is able to burn with the light of Christ. Even still, we consider that oil is at once a thing used for common and ordinary tasks as well as for celebration and honor. By this, again, we glimpse the

⁴⁹Ps. 23:5b

⁵⁰Mark 6:13

⁵¹Luke 7:37-38

Christian life, which is unified by rhythms of quiet and common devotion as well as zealous and reverent revelation.

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

We accept that when the Scripture was recorded, those who set it down lived as if the return of our Lord was to be in their lifetime. However, now many centuries sense, we know that it has been no short time between the first and second coming of Christ. By this, we may understand that when Jesus refers to *sleep*, he speaks of death. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him,” that is, those asleep in Christ are those dead who shall be raised to the resurrection of life and those not asleep in Christ shall be resurrected to judgment.⁵²

And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

As the Psalmist sings, “At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.”⁵³ Jerome notes that it was common in the Jewish tradition to consider midnight the time of the Christ’s coming, as it was at midnight in Egypt that the destroyer came and visited the houses of those who did not have the blood of the lamb over their doorposts with death to the firstborn sons and passed over those who did.⁵⁴ So

⁵²1 Thess. 4:14 , c.f. Jerome, 283

⁵³Ps. 119:62

⁵⁴Jerome, 283

here the return of Christ is said to be at midnight, recalling the narrative of the Exodus, where those who believed in the word of God were spared the loss brought by death.

Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

As the Scripture teaches, all are to be resurrected on the Last Day, “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”⁵⁵ Though when the virgins slept we understand them to have died, both wise and foolish shall rise at the coming of the bridegroom, the Christ, to stand before His judgment. “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”⁵⁶

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

Here, Augustine is clear: “They sought for what they had been most prone to seek for, to shine, that is, with others’ oil, to walk after others’ praises.”⁵⁷ The foolish virgins had taken no oil with them to begin with, that is, they had no deeds of obedience or faith through the course of their lives. Being of deceptive heart, they then try to fool the wise virgins into thinking them similar, implying that they had brought oil but that it burned no longer. For this reason the Proverbs say, “Favour is deceitful” and again, “The wicked

⁵⁵1 Cor. 15:21-22

⁵⁶Dan. 12:2

⁵⁷PL 38:578

worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.”⁵⁸

Moreover, the prophetic word anticipating the coming end speaks of the New Jerusalem, “The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”⁵⁹ Since the foolish virgins lie of their works and service to the Christ, they are unfit for His kingdom.

But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

The response of the wise virgins seems inappropriate. After all, the Scripture teaches us, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”⁶⁰ It would seem, then, that the wise virgins should offer grace to the foolish, to pray on their behalf and ask God for the deliverance of their souls. However, we must be prudent to the timing of the parable. The scene is not one that relates to the present age, as the instructions of St. James are directed, but to the age to come. On that day, there shall be no cause for prayer, for as God says to Jeremiah on the day of calamity, “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession

⁵⁸Prov. 31:30, 11:18

⁵⁹Zeph. 3:13

⁶⁰Jas. 5:16

to me: for I will not hear thee.”⁶¹ Therefore, the wise virgins send the foolish away, for on the Last Day, “Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”⁶²

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

Though the foolish virgins seek to buy, they have no hope. As the Psalmist sings, “For there is no one in death, that is mindful of thee: and who shall confess to thee in hell?”⁶³ On the Last Day, there shall be no time to make a confession for salvation. On that day, “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth,” but it shall be as with the demons, who “also believe, and tremble.”⁶⁴ Therefore, the door is shut. In this parable, the wedding feast and marriage is entirely closed to those who would seek to enter after it has begun. We understand this to refer to the final judgment, when the Christ shall separate the wheat from the chaff, the lambs from the goats. For as it was once said, “For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation,” it shall be no more and with judgment shall come the denial of future confession and the finality of the Christ’s adjudication.⁶⁵

⁶¹Jer. 7:16

⁶²Rom. 14:12

⁶³Ps. 6:5 DRB

⁶⁴Phil. 2:10, Jas. 2:19

⁶⁵2 Cor. 6:2

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

Again, though they failed in the acceptable time to believe, now they confess Him as Lord. As Jesus says in the Gospels, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”⁶⁶ As the foolish virgins tried to fool the wise into believing they had oil, so now do they seek to fool our Lord into thinking them part of His disciples. The Shepherd knows His sheep and it is written of the man who claims ignorance of Him, “But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant,” for he has been forgotten by Him on that day.⁶⁷

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

On this Jerome warns us to not “subscribe to superstitious interpretations and those that are spoken ‘line by line’ by people who fabricate things by their own arbitrary will.”⁶⁸ For if we should not take care, we could infer the parable to mean that Christ shall return at midnight specifically, as tradition holds above, or we should become paranoid in our vigilance, always anticipating an apocalypse moments from our present.

⁶⁶Matt. 7:22-23

⁶⁷1 Cor. 14:38

⁶⁸Jerome, 285

However, parables are to be read in full, that which proceeds informing the whole. To that end, we understand these words of warning to be the encouragement of the heart toward pursuit of the glorious works of God. Since we do not know the moment of Christ's return, but that He shall, we task ourselves with the present labor of righteousness, so as to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and to be an instrument of His glory and honor, "looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."⁶⁹

The Parables Read Together

Taken together, the two parables serve as an important mirror, revealing the character of the Lord's return. It is not without significance that the first parable considers the coming of the Lord in immediacy, for the parable preceding it in the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel speaks of the son who is killed by the rebellious servants. The next parable our Lord recounts is one in which He immediately addresses the ultimate fate of those rebellious servants, who are denied entry to the marriage feast for they desired not to come and even despised Him for the invitation. Ultimately, they are cast out, even those who slip in seemingly unnoticed. The parable serves to illumine the return of our Lord, but in particular the quality of His coming, that it shall be sudden and surprising, yet a purposed response.

It is not surprising, therefore, that what follows in the Scripture are accounts of the dangers of the present age. In the interlude between the parable of the king's

⁶⁹Phil. 2:12, Heb. 12:15

marriage feast and the parable of the ten virgins, Christ rebukes the alleged divinity of Caesar, condemns the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection, rejects the arrogant works of the Pharisees, recounts the signs of His return, and gives a brief parable illuminating the place of the believer to be vigilant. Only after this discourse does He continue to speak in parables with narrative quality, recounting the ten virgins in a manner that points not to the general place of His coming again but to the judgment that follows, which is the logical end of the progression that has built off the first parable considered. Again, it is unsurprising that what follows is the parable of the talents, which is similarly themed, and then concluded with an explication of the Christ's judgment at the close of the twenty-fifth chapter.

The parables function much as a medieval diptych, which causes a viewer's mind to "shuttle back and forth between one panel to another across the divide, traveling back and forth between two worlds."⁷⁰ Though both address judgment, since the former considers it in the transcendence and the latter its imminence, we as readers and hearers are left to occupy the space between the divide, wherein is the present age of the Church and the current state of our souls.

⁷⁰John Drury, *Painting the Word: Christian Images and Their Meanings* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), 12.

Conclusion

The parables of Christ's coming, like all apocalyptic literature, do not deal exclusively in terms of future events, but carry significance for the present moment. Taking Jerome's caution seriously that we do not stumble into speculation and superstition on the return of Christ, we instead ask what the parables task us with in the immediacy. We understand by them that we are to be found worthy of that noble crown of fellowship with Christ our Lord, bought by Him for us should we accept His Lordship. In the first parable, we consider that this Lordship is open to all who would come, but that we may risk rebuking it for we are too busy with our own labors or because we try to take of it without the truth of conversion having transformed us. In the second, we understand that the natural outcome of our conversion is a faith manifest by works, which is the oil of the Spirit bringing about all good and righteous action that shall exult the name of our God. Without either of these elements: faith in His Lordship and the evidence of that faith's good work through the power of grace, we are found outside the marriage feast or thrown out all together.

But who shall come to this marriage? In the following chapter, we shall turn our reflection to this question and consider two parables of subversion, where the expected is turned on its head by subversive, abundant grace, seen through the lens of mercy as an economic exchange.

CHAPTER THREE

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Shorter Parables and Subversion

Introduction

In this chapter I shall focus on the literary use of subversion achieved in some of the parables. Subversion, in this context, is the purposeful misdirection of the narrative in order to point to the larger context of God's grace. This subversion may be subtle, employing expected tropes and images until the last line inverts the meaning of the narrative, though even then it is a careful work to see the inversion properly. Other times, the inversion is blatant and abrupt. An example not employed to address the themes of this chapter, but considered in the chapter following, would be that of the Good Samaritan, in which the Samaritan is made to be the type of the merciful hero, subverting the disdainful view Jews held of the Samaritan people in general. However, such as is the case with the Good Samaritan, the literary device of subversion can be easily lost in analysis when the parable as a whole illustrates a more significant point or is of some length, such that to focus exclusively on inversion would be to mitigate the meaning. To this end, I have considered here two parables of considerably shorter length, so as to focus on how the place of misdirection works internally to achieve the purposes of the text.

The first is the Parable of the Lamp and the second the Parable of the Two Debtors, in each of which we shall see subversion at play, but with qualities unique to each. In the first, the focus shall be on how positive statements regarding the light that

shines forth from believers presumes a darkness that is present in the unfaithful, thereby returning us to the question of judgment even in the midst of exhorting words. In the second, we shall see that the subversion occurs in the contrast of the debtors who are equated in the eyes of the Collector, pointing to the favor of God toward both the Jews and the Gentiles through the Messiah, subverting the expectation that it was only for Israel that the Christ came.

Taken together, we shall glean an understanding of the full Christian life, as the parables themselves are worded so as to give us pause in the face of the silent questions they pose to us, explored further below.

The Parable of the Lamp

The first shorter parable to be considered is that of the lamp, found in the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.¹

The parable appears in all three of the synoptic Gospels, though slightly truncated or rearranged in each, and notably the first line occurs twice in Luke, the first instance as shown above and the second as an introduction to the nature of the soul.² Narratively, the parable falls immediately after the Parable of the Sower has been explained and right

¹Luke 8:16-18

²c.f. Matt. 5:15, Mark 4:21, and Luke 11:33

before He indicates that His mother and brothers are those who do the work of God. We therefore understand it to serve as a hinge between the heard and received Word and the word of God made manifest by deed, as the parable itself inherently makes reference. Here, subversion is found in the joining of confessed Word and practiced word, a command for consistency that anticipates His warning against the leaven of the Pharisees in chapter twelve.³

No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.

What is this candle but the Word of God, understood in two ways? For the psalmist sings, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”⁴ Then the word was the instruction of God, as the psalmist has also said, “I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.”⁵ Further, Christ Himself says, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”⁶ So the flame is the word of God, His instructions and precepts, which cannot be hidden away. For our Lord says, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”⁷ For the word of God must be proclaimed, as further the psalmist sings, “Sing praises to the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings,”

³Luke 12:1

⁴Ps. 119:105

⁵Ps. 119:16

⁶Matt. 4:4

⁷Matt. 24:35

and even still speaks Christ, “And the gospel must first be published among all nations.”⁸

This sets the candle on a candlestick, so that all may know of the wonders and instructions of God, as Origen wrote of the place of the Church, “By its proclamation, the Word of God gives light to all who are in this world and illuminates those in the house with the rays of the truth, filling the minds of all with divine knowledge.”⁹

Even so, the candle is further understood to be that Word of God who came into the world, who “was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”¹⁰ For the Scripture refers often to presence of God among His people as Light: “The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee,” and still, “And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness *was* about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.”¹¹ For we understand by the Gospel of John that Christ is that Light of God who came into the world, such that He cannot be hidden away, as His enemies tried to accomplish in vain. For just as we understood the word of God to be the lamp unto the feet and a light to the path, to what end does it lead? Surely to the One who says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”¹² It is because of this Origen says

⁸Ps. 9:11, Mark 13:10

⁹FC 94:175

¹⁰John 1:14

¹¹Num. 6:25, Ezek. 1:4

¹²John 14:6

further, “The vessels of the house are the powers of the soul. The bed is the body.”¹³ It is into this space that Christ enters, the believer having taken the light of the word of God and the Light that is the Word of God together and in embracing both of them has filled themselves with resplendent light.

For it is said elsewhere by our Saviour, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.”¹⁴ We understand then that once word and Word abide in a person, they are transformed into light themselves. By the pedestal of holy Church, they are presented before the world unashamed, such that Christ instructs, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” for it is by their natural labors having been made light that many are brought to glory.¹⁵

For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.

But for those who have not been transfigured by the Light, in these words there comes a caution. Jesus speaks this parable after He has explained the meaning of the Sower, who threw seed about the land where some took root and some withered and died. To those who did not receive the seed but let it wither, Christ points to coming judgment. The positive implication of His words point us to consider the persistence of grace made manifest through the believer, for it is said, “By this shall all *men* know that ye are my

¹³FC 94:174

¹⁴Matt. 5:14

¹⁵Matt. 28:19 , c.f. Heb. 2:10

disciples, if ye have love one to another;” and, even still, “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”¹⁶ For we understand by the parable of the virgins that faith is made perfect through the manifestation of it in exercise and practice, and therefore nothing of the believer is secret in that he manifests openly the Light of Christ within him. However, I have said that by these good words Christ also warns, for in saying there is nothing secret and recognizing the believer who has the Light makes the Light known, we understand that the unbeliever, who does not have the Light but stands in opposition to Him, also makes these works known. It is written, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.”¹⁷ Moreover, “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”¹⁸ We must have carefully tuned ears to hear the word, for in our exuberance for the powerful beauty, we miss the place of judgment. For what is meant by saying that the secret things shall be made known and then go abroad? It means that those things done are not only made known in this life but in the life that is to come. About those who are judged and found wanting we have already spoken previously, but again let us remember that we are told, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”¹⁹ Therefore, let us

¹⁶John 13:35, Jas. 2:22

¹⁷Ps. 53:1

¹⁸Eccles. 12:14

know the secret things are never secret and that all that is done bears witness to the world, either as a testament to Light or as an offense unto Him.

Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

Once more we return to obscure images, which is why the Lord commands that we be careful in our hearing. What is meant by the one who already has being given more and the one without or being with only in appearance having all taken away? For we note that this is not the only place in the Scripture Christ makes this pronouncement, but when He tells the parable of the monies entrusted to the servants, He concludes it with the words, “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath,” and we take this repetition to mean there is particular significance to the teaching.²⁰ Certainly we must understand these words to be about judgment, for the proverb says, “Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed.”²¹ Moreover, as Christ condemned the Pharisees for their apparent piety that was nothing more than sepulchers of pretense, so too does He warn those who only seem to shine forth the works of Christ but are in their hearts unrepentant and false. As was spoken of the foolish virgins and of the man thrown from the wedding feast, so too we see that such falsity avails nothing in the end but the condemnation of soul, which is stripped of everything and put out into the

¹⁹Apoc. 21:8

²⁰Matt. 25:29

²¹Prov. 13:21

darkness. Upon this the tension of the Faith balances, that the condition of the heart must be held alongside the deeds of the heart, that the two are inseparable, that “I the Lord search the heart, *I* try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.”²² Because of this, let we who believe be careful in how we examine our own hearts, since “All the ways of a man *are* clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.”²³ Let our prayer then join the psalmist: “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.”²⁴

The Parable of the Two Debtors

The second, short parable to be considered is also found in the Gospel according to St. Luke, recorded earlier in the seventh chapter:

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.²⁵

The parable and its context are only found in the Gospel of St. Luke, but a similar, expanded parable is found in the Gospel of St. Matthew in the eighteenth chapter. A reason for this could be the audience. Matthew, traditionally understood to be the Gospel for the Hellenized Jews, expands the parable of forgiveness to focus on the ingratitude of the one forgiven much. Luke, the Gospel traditionally focused on the Gentiles, frames

²²Jer. 17:10

²³Prov. 16:2

²⁴Ps. 19:12

²⁵Luke 7:40-43

the parable within the context of a woman wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair when a Pharisee wonders in the quiet of his heart why such a thing has come to pass. Jesus answers by insisting that those forgiven more love more for it, indicating the impoverished state of the Gentiles grafted into the family of God. Therefore, Luke's focus is particularly on the mercy of the Collector to forgive with equity whom He will. In this, we see subversion of expectation at work in the role of forgiveness, in that both debtors are cleared of their accounts without requirement to work or earn the mercy despite the difference of their debts being significant.

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

Who are these two debtors but those who were promised the Messiah and the ones who were grafted into their line? As Ambrose writes, they are “the two peoples, the one from the Jews, the other from the Gentiles, in debt to the Creditor of the heavenly treasure!”²⁶ We note still further that the Jews are given less of a debt, as they have been promised from Abraham the blessings given to them through the wonder of the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection. But we consider further that we know them by their number, for they are said to be indebted fifty pence as there are fifty recorded generations from Abraham to Christ in the genealogy recounted by St. Matthew in the

²⁶EHG 201

opening of his gospel.²⁷ And what of the five hundred? As Ezekiel records in his vision of the coming glory of God,

Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.²⁸

Who is this prince but Christ? And is the East gate not structured such that,

He measured the east side with the measuring reed, five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed round about. He measured the north side, five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed round about. He measured the south side, five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed. He turned about to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed.²⁹

Therefore, the five hundred spoken of in the parable recalls us to the size of the gate the Prince of Peace alone shall open to those covenant people as well as to those who are grafted into His service.

And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

For what could anyone offer to God in exchange for His mercy? As the Apostle writes of the sacrifices made in the Old Testament, that it was truly Christ, “whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness

²⁷See Matt. 1:2-16

²⁸Ezek. 44:1-3

²⁹Ezek. 42:16-19

for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”³⁰ Even the sacrifices made of old were but to stay the hand of God’s judgment so that those of faith who believed in the promise of God were counted as righteous before Him through the atoning work of the Son.³¹ It is therefore said that neither Jew nor Gentile could pay the debt owed to God, whose mercy is so abundant and extraordinary that it surpasses all articulation which tries to make it intelligible. Moreover, it is written not that the collector forced the debtors to work for their debts but that in equity He forgave them, counting it against neither that neither had anything to offer. Where then does the great love of the Gentile, who owes more, come from? If he has not been made to feel of less worth by the surpassing goodness and forgiveness of the Creator, why should his love be so much more?

It is the most wondrous of mysteries that God should have chosen to offer reconciliation to all peoples to Himself in equity. Though the revelation of this grace comes slow, for the Syrophoenician woman is told, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and further still, “It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.”³² But knowing the value of God’s mercy she persists, imploring Him by saying, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.”³³ Her we see explicitly the implicit grace expressed by Christ through this parable. For the woman knowing how undeserving she was to receive any benefit of the covenant

³⁰Rom. 3:25

³¹See Heb. 11

³²Matt. 15:24, 26

³³Matt. 15:27

still persists in a faithful trust that God's mercy is great enough to be rewarded even to those who have not been first chosen, trusting that the smallest gift would still be abundant blessing. (Indeed, this recalls the words of Christ that there are other sheep in His fold that are unknown, the premise of which was explored at more length in the previous chapter.)

Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

As Ephrem the Syrian notes, it was through humble words our Lord rebuked Simon so as to bring him to understanding.³⁴ For it is written, “But without a parable spake he not unto them,” so that “Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?” but that “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”³⁵ Simon was able to hear, for the parable spoken to him was a simple one, characterized by an uncontroversial premise—Simon identifies himself with the man who owes less to the collector, as he perceives himself to be more righteous than the woman at the feet of Jesus. This our Lord does not dispute, but speaks beyond the presumption to the issue of God's mercy. By action, Simon has ignored the Collector's right to judge and forgive as He sees fit and has instead presumed himself to be the one of worth and value, but Christ portrays a Collector free to forgive unequivocally, which results in different responses from those He forgives. For as much as Simon might be forgiven, he shows no humility of heart that the woman, having been offered forgiveness, shows toward our Lord.

³⁴FC 91:299-300

³⁵Mark 4:34, 8:18, 4:9

The Parables Read Together

Read together, to what do these parables point us? They direct our focus to both the importance of a faith confessed and lived, as well as to humble us in our consideration of the wideness of God's mercy.

For of the time of the Messiah, the Lord says, "But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."³⁶ But the true inscription of such laws upon the heart carry with it the natural manifestation of those laws lived out in the fullness of a life in service to God. As the foolish virgins who tried in vain to take of the works of other in the last hour, so we must be careful to have been faithful before the hour of judgment, when the secret things are made known in this world and the world to come. Our confession of the Word must be met by our duty to His word, which we carry out in even the smallest of tasks, "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me."³⁷ It was for these things the reward of Paradise was given, for they acted on the Light within them in such a way as the Light was not hid, but made known among men.

Even still, we must consider that the second parable calls us to even greater contemplation, in that it asks us to regard frankly the lowliness of the circumstances from

³⁶Jer. 31:33

³⁷Matt. 25:35-26

which we have been elevated. Many of us our Gentiles ourselves, grafted into the chosen people of God and we must answer in the privacy of our own hearts if our thankfulness for His grace mirrors that of one forgiven so much debt or, even still, that of a woman who washes the feet of Jesus by her tears and then dries them with her hair. Should we ever ascend beyond such reverent awe at the wonder of God's mercy, we have defaced the great wonders of God to our shame. A righteous and holy fear of God is one that with humble heart boldly approaches the throne of grace, but makes there to kneel, to submit, to pour out the sacrifice of nard and the tears of the gratefully forgiven.

Conclusion

The tension of the two parables that use subversion of conventional expectation as means of communicating fundamental aspects of the life of the believer return us to the questions of judgment posed by the two parables initially explored in the second chapter. Having considered here mercy and the inclusion of those in the kingdom of God who were previously excluded, we now turn to consider two remaining parables, which explore the theme of violence and the implicit difficulty of suffering, as well as the mercy and goodness of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

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Violence

Introduction

In this final chapter, I consider two parables of Christ that relate the soteriological drama through the introduction of violence to the narrative. In the first, violence is used to illustrate the internal state of man as he rebels against the authority of God. In the second, violence is the consequence of man's internal struggle, manifested externally as his rejection of God's Law and his torment of the Prophets until his greatest rebellion, seeking to kill the Son. In both cases, the place of the violent image is pivotal to the story and, at the same time, markedly unembellished. Parables tend already to be sparse in detail, but it is notable that the character of the violence employed in these parables is more prescriptive than descriptive, that is there is no room to glory in the violence, but violence is included as a sorrowful reality in a fallen world.

As René Girard treats extensively in *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*, the Gospels can be read as the unfolding struggle of mimetic desire.¹ But whereas the Girardian synthesis falls into a pattern whereby the ultimate truth revealed is our entrapment to violent forms of mimesis, orthodoxy suggests that the mimetic struggle is resolved only through the person of Christ, who is at once our Good Samaritan and the

¹René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. trans. James G. Williams. (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 1-34.

murdered heir to the kingdom of God, by whom we are reconciled and made heirs ourselves, which we see elaborated upon within these two parables.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

The first parable to be engaged is that of the Good Samaritan, found in the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.²

Notably, the Good Samaritan appears only in Luke's Gospel, perhaps because the author's intended audience was Gentile and the text is motivated by scenes that show Gentile peoples being reconciled to and brought into the promises of Jesus. Here, Christ uses an unexpected trope, that of a Samaritan who shows compassion and mercy for a Jew, to illustrate both the nature of His kingdom and the sort of Savior that He is Himself. To that end, the parable is considered in two ways.

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

²Luke 10:30-36

It may be said that this parable should be read in two ways. The first, as tropological instruction: a certain man makes a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho and thieves overtake him. He is robbed of his possessions, wounded, and abandoned, left for dead. The unspecific nature of this man who is known only to us by virtue of his humanity makes him a universal figure for the reader. This man could be young or old, Jew or Gentile, slave or free. That he is unspecified is of particular importance to the instruction, in that Christ asserts from the beginning of the narrative that regardless of who the traveler might be, he is nonetheless offered charity by an unexpected source.

But still the parable may be understood in a second way, that is, allegorically. A certain man is in fact representative of the soul, which through the pain of original sin is quitted from Jerusalem and sent down in exile away from it, where the master of thieves, Satan and his devils, set upon it to strip away all the soul's good and wound it to the point of near death.³ Violence is done unto the soul when the image of God within it is bruised by the weight of sin. Indeed, this is the pleasure of Satan, for it is said by our Lord, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."⁴ The man is said to be half dead for the division of the soul and flesh, which under the curse causes the former to be immortal and the later to be mortal. Indeed, why should Satan and his demons depart except to hide in the shadows the nature of their craft, so as to beset another traveler? "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."⁵

³Aquinas 372

⁴John 10:10

⁵2 Cor. 11:14

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

In the first reading, we understand the man to be passed literally by a priest and a Levite. As he is said to have been half-dead, we could infer that the priest and the Levite presumed him already dead and therefore they passed so as to observe the Law,

There shall [no priest] be defiled for the dead among his people: But for his kin, that is near unto him, *that is*, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother, And for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which hath had no husband; for her may he be defiled.⁶

And, more specifically, “Neither shall [the high priest] go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother.”⁷ However, the Mishnah provides for the touching of a dead body by the priests and Levites if it is for the sake of a *met mitzvah*, though this was somewhat disputed among the rabbis.⁸ Even still, the journey of the priest and the Levite down from Jericho leads us to conclude that their time of service, and thus ritual cleanliness, was completed. Their passing by recalls the words of Christ,

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment,

⁶Lev 21:1-3

⁷Lev 21:11

⁸*Nazir*, 7.1 explains that even though a High Priest or Levite is never to touch a corpse (c.f. Lev 21:1) he should if there is no one else around who is able to. It seems that the provision was first made for the sake of wartime so that bodies would not be abandoned to mass graves, though it was later adopted as a way of tending to those whose family would have abandoned them in death. This was the *mitzvah*, to look after the corpse of one for whom no one else had regard. Further, R. Eliezer adds that even a High Priest on journey who encounters a neglected corpse may defile himself for the sake of tending to the body, while a Nazarite may not. Since neither of the persons in question was a Nazarite, we can only assume that the Mishnah had provided them with not only the means but also the command to attend to the corpse, which they ignored.

mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.⁹

But by the allegorical interpretation another thing may be understood. It may be said that the priest represents the Law and the Levite the prophets who spoke by the Law, which were not enough on their own to ransom the man from his state of being half-dead,

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.¹⁰

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

Here the narrative, read through the perspective of moral instruction, presents us with a surprise. We suppose the assaulted man who came from Jerusalem to be an Israelite. When his fellow Israelites pass him by in order to keep with a nuanced piety, we are upset at the injustice. However, as hearers of the parable we are confronted with the unexpected arrival of a Samaritan, an outcast in the eyes of Israel, as the Samaritan woman says to Jesus elsewhere in the Scripture, “How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?’ for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”¹¹ And it is only this Samaritan, the Scripture says, who felt compassion for

⁹Matt. 23:23-24

¹⁰Heb. 8:7-9

¹¹John 4:9

the man. The Samaritan, who would be despised by the one he looks upon with compassion, seeks the other's good well and above his own and risks the mark of uncleanness, for "He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days."¹²

Concerning the allegory, we understand the Samaritan to be Christ, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously."¹³ For the Samaritan is said to have been coming down and it is said of the Son of Man, "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."¹⁴ Moreover, Christ identifies Himself as the Samaritan so as to signify that neither the Law nor the Prophets were sufficient for the salvation of man, but that one who was entirely other, who "hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him," should be the one whose work was "in bringing many sons unto glory."¹⁵ For it also says the Samaritan had compassion on the man, as Christ, seeing no means of healing to be within us, brought the grace of redemption to our infirmities, transfiguring the suffering of our souls eternally and even the suffering of our bodies in the present age from affliction without end to promise, as it is written, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."¹⁶

¹²Num. 19:11

¹³1 Pet. 2:23

¹⁴John 3:13

¹⁵Isa. 53:2, Heb. 2:10

¹⁶2 Cor. 1:5

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

The Samaritan does not examine the man and then resort to a belabored plan of how to tend to him, but meets his needs immediately. Giving the choicest of what he has to offer, he loves the stranger as he would love himself, fulfilling the command of Christ, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,” and further,

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.¹⁷

Moreover, he does not only meet his immediate needs but also looks to the whole of the need, bringing the wounded man temporal comfort but insisting that the whole of him be cared for over time.

Allegorically, Christ applies wine and oil unto our souls. For of wine and the age of the Messiah it is said, “And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.”¹⁸ The wine of life in the Messiah poured out upon our infirm spirits, which were previously given to the captivity of death. Moreover, He then applies oil, the anointing of life, for

¹⁷John 13:35, Matt. 5:43-45

¹⁸Amos 9:14

by the anointing we have been freed of sin, such that it is written, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.”¹⁹ And again, that by anointing we might bring healing to those infirmed in body and soul,

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.²⁰

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Again, we see by a tropological reading that the duty of the Christian is found not in help that it is fleeting and convenient, but sustained. As we are to “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ,” we do not assuage the poor and in need with small offerings of little consequence, but in sustained compassion and the outpouring of ourselves, to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”²¹

But in the allegorical reading, we find Christ handing the monies of heaven to those given charge over new believers, to tend and watch over them and nurse them into health with the promise of a reward to come. For as it is written, “My brethren, be not

¹⁹Isa. 10:27

²⁰Jas. 5:14-15

²¹Gal. 6:2, Eph. 5:2

many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.”²² But it is also said,

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.²³

We understand these monies of heaven to be the good doctrine given by those called to watch over the faithful as well as their authority to rightly and duly administer the sacraments of God and the promise that Christ shall return, as it is also written, “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”²⁴

²²Jas. 3:1

²³1 Pet. 5:1-4

²⁴Apoc. 22:20

The Parable of the Householder

The second parable to be considered is that of the Householder, found in the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.²⁵

The parable is found in all three of the canonical Gospels. On the whole, they are identical except that the Lukian account does not include the details of the vineyard being enclosed and containing a tower, for this is a direct allusion to Isaiah and one that a Gentile readership would not have been familiar with. This is perhaps one of the most direct and explicit parables that Christ uses as reference to Himself, notably incorporating and thereby exegeting the aforementioned text from Isaiah, considered below.

²⁵Matt. 21:33-39

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

And to what shall we compare this vineyard? Many things might be said. We know the householder to be God and in one sense the vineyard He planted to be the garden of the created world, for it is recorded, “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.”²⁶ Even still, when sin and death had entered that blessed Garden, we find still another reference, “And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard,” for as before the Fall so after, man was given charge over the earth to care for it by God’s command, for “Who hath given him a charge over the earth? Or who hath disposed the whole world?”²⁷ Moreover, He speaks here of the vineyard that stands as Israel, for in one place it is said, “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it,” and in another, “And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.”²⁸ But in letting it out to the care of others, God had given them little to be responsible for, as Chrysostom says, “It was [God] who planted the vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and

²⁶Gen. 2:8

²⁷Gen. 9:20, Job 34:13

²⁸Ps. 80:8, Isa. 5:2

dug a winepress in it and built a tower. He left little for them to do.”²⁹ And what sort of fruit was planted in this vineyard, but the fruits that were the promises of God, as it is written, “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord Shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; They shall be fat and flourishing.”³⁰ But in giving this vineyard to the care of those husbandmen, God allowed that for a time they should care for those blessings with goodness and singleness of heart, but in giving them the privilege of their choices, allowed them to tend it as they saw fit, so that eventually it was said by the Apostle, “They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”³¹ For the Jews were entrusted with the promise of God until the time the Messiah appeared and they denied Him, whereby it is now said that those are children of God who seek His face, Jew or Gentile.

And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

For what is time to God? In one place it says, “And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day,” but in another, “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day,” and even still, “I am Alpha and

²⁹PG 58:639

³⁰Ps. 92:12-14

³¹Rom. 9:8

Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.”³² So when we perceive of the time of fruit drawing near, that is the coming of the Messiah, the arrival of the servants might seem early to us, when it is indeed of no consequence of timeliness to God. For these servants are the Law and the Prophets, by which Israel was instructed what was owed to them unto God for the provision of the world He had given them. For Jesus says, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's,” and what is God's but those things He required of Israel, whether by sacrifice and offering or the whole of their being, as He said to them in the wilderness, “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart.”³³

And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

But the Jews were offended by the Law and the Prophets, and, “Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts.”³⁴ Resisting the commands of God to repent, they took those servants of God and abused them; “They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”³⁵ Indeed, as Chrysostom further says, while the

³²Gen. 1:5, 2 Pet. 3:8, Apoc. 22:13

³³Mark 12:17, Deut. 6:6

³⁴Zech. 7:12

³⁵Heb. 11:37

tenants deserved punishment for neglecting to give unto the householder what was owed Him, “While deserving punishment, they themselves inflicted punishment,” and conspired to frustrate the command of God.³⁶ For a violence lives in the man that still desires to cling to the rule of his flesh, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”³⁷ The flesh seeks to rule and enflamed the people who had turned from God to worship the false images and idols. They persecuted those servants of God who bid them render to Him what was owed, so that He said,

I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them*, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.³⁸

And why should He send so many prophets before sending His son? As Chrysostom reasons, it was “in order that they might repent and condemn themselves for the things they had done to others. He hoped they would set aside their anger and reverence him when he came.”³⁹ God wished the chosen people to prove worthy of the Messiah He would offer to them, but they hardened themselves against the words of His servants and therefore He says by them, “Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.”⁴⁰

³⁶PG 58:640

³⁷Gal. 5:17

³⁸Jer. 35:15

³⁹PL 58:640

⁴⁰Ps. 95:11

Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

Here, what needs be said but that God is so great in His desire to bring the rebellious man into relationship with Himself that He prevailed in sending His servants, desiring that they return the commitment of their hearts to Him, “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”⁴¹

But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

Here, God does not speak out of ignorance concerning those who have tortured and ridiculed His prophets. Indeed, elsewhere He says, “And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they *are* a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.”⁴² So He sends His son with full knowledge that they should abhor Him, but by signifying what they should have done by means of reverence He illustrates how great the sin would be when they turned against Him, for it was also written, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”⁴³

But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

⁴¹1 Tim. 2:4

⁴²Ezek. 2:5

⁴³Isa. 53:3

So great was the iniquity of those in the vineyard, it was likened to the words spoken by God in the days before, “And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.”⁴⁴ They had given themselves over to the powers of Satan, “For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence” and moreover it was foretold of them, “Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.”⁴⁵ Haven given themselves over to the authority of the evil one and delighting in the destruction of those things blessed by God, they persisted further into the irrationality of their sin and deluded themselves with their pride, as it is written, “The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?”⁴⁶ In their madness, in the deception of their hearts, they thought to murder the Son and take from Him the inheritance which was only His to have, failing to understand the mystery that was to be the Faith, that God, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,” was to bring Jew and Gentile into relationship, to bring glory and honor to Himself, in spite of the malicious workings of the tenants who had claimed His vineyard as their own.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Isa. 1:15

⁴⁵Prov. 4:17, Hosea 10:13

⁴⁶Obad. 1:3

⁴⁷Eph. 1:5

And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

What more might be said of this, but that it was later written of our Lord, “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.”⁴⁸ For the wages of man’s evil against God were so great that it drove him unto the greatest of all iniquities, the murder of the Holy One, who gave Himself willingly for ransom, so that those whose hands pierced His own might have the hope of eternal salvation and union with God. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”⁴⁹ And this is the mystery, that the hands of the One who created the hands that put nails into His flesh opened even to these the way of peace, for He says, “But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.”⁵⁰ For God did not regard the violence of sinful men and the apparent victory of Satan to be the triumph, but through the sacrifice of His Son did open the way of salvation to all, so that even the man of iniquity might know Life.

The Parables Read Together

The parables expose us to the graphic and brutal reality of violence as an inescapable reality of the world and of man. To begin with, violence is not a mere physical act of aggression but is rooted in a cycle of scandal, whereby the intended order of things is violated by the action of an agent against the intended purpose of the Creator.

⁴⁸Heb. 13:12

⁴⁹Isa. 53:6

⁵⁰Ezek. 33:19

It speaks to the core of evil that those things loved by God are hated by those that hate Him, seeking to destroy His good through purposeful transgression against the design of the cosmos He ordained. It is to this end that Satan and his allies best themselves against man, to drive him far from the grace and benevolence of God and to grieve the heart of the Almighty by separating Him from one among His creation. Further, this speaks also to the hatred of man, who having succumb in the Fall to the nature of sin and death, now actively antagonizes the Creator. In the Boethian synthesis, this is the nature of all men that desire to be reconciled to the good of God, but it is this same desire that is violated by sin and manifest as pride, for the ruled to usurp the Ruler and coronate himself as lord. Therefore, the prophets are tortured and Christ is crucified, for man's desire to be his own god and to recreate the world in his own image drives him to a cyclical violence, wherein he must constantly assert power against the Creator and against another man who should take from him the authority to be his own god.

It was this desire to be a god—however much marked by deception—that first motivated the parents of humanity to fall from their blessedness and enslave their children to the same condition of wretched heart. But this, too, was a desire that was not entirely unholy. Says the psalmist and again our Christ, “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?”⁵¹ For corruption came not through the natural desire to be the pentacle of God's creation but to defy the Creator Himself and the ordinances He had established to govern the world. Rejecting the prohibition to eat of the tree, they ate, and therefore damned for the sake of being a god unto themselves, but so Jeremiah records,

⁵¹John 10:34

“Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods?”⁵² It was thus that the first violence of man was violence against ontology, the rejection of his created purpose and a refutation of the order established by God. Therefore we see repeated in the story of the Samaritan a man best by his own lusts and the viciousness of demons wounds himself to the point of death, slicing into his own flesh and desecrating his own created form, having hated the nature given him by the Creator and wishing instead to create for himself a being that he desired.

But man could not forever be a destroyer to himself, looking externally to wound what appeared to him to be better than he. For as Able brought a sacrifice pleasing to God and Cain did not, Cain slew his brother out of violence against essentiality, that is Able’s desire to worship God through obedience. Cain desired to worship God based on his own reconstruction of the sacrificial system, which was a violence to his ontology as it stood in opposition to the nature of the whole of the creation. When Cain saw, however, that his sacrifice was not accepted, he had hatred against his brother who was able to sacrifice rightly. Cain slew him out of this hatred, for he desired still to be a god unto himself, to establish a rite of sacrifice fitting in his eyes, and continue in a denial of the Creator’s authority over the creation. As Girard puts it, this is the process of mimetic violence. This violence is against the essential, however, as it progressed from self-glory to self-loathing, from the violence caused to a soul entrapped in the pride of its ways to the manifestation of resentment toward another, whose essential character presented a standard that Cain was unable and unwilling to conform himself. Again, we consider the

⁵²Jer. 16:20

parables and see this is the nature of the reaction of those wicked husbandmen against the prophets of God, slaying them for presenting a model of formation that those entrenched in their own desires could not abide to hear. They murdered, tortured, and defamed for the sake of the consolation of their own evil, having submitted to the yoke of their own wills and desiring to remake the world in their own images.

Ultimately, this cycle of violence reaches its culmination in the death of Christ. Here, the violence was against cosmology, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being,” “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist,” and moreover, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”⁵³ By cosmology it is meant the foundation that ordains the whole of that which is to be, for the crucifixion of Christ was the ultimate violence against the Creator Himself. As the parable of the vineyard shows, the husbandmen thought to kill the Son and so receive His reward. Why should they presume this unless they had recognized Him as God, with the authority to ordain the whole of the cosmic order and to define the terms by which all things were made and would be made and would ever be made? Therefore they kill Him, so as to become gods to themselves in the ultimate sense, to commit regicide and become a people ruled by their own desires and to establish rites and rituals that fit the inclination of their hearts, an endless repetition of Dionysian cycle.

However, it is the scandal of the cross itself, as Paul describes it, that usurps the model of mimetic violence and triumphs over the evil intention of man’s desire to be a god unto himself through the passivity and victory of Christ. First, in His passivity He

⁵³Acts 17:28, Col. 1:17, John 1:3

took on the violence done unto Him without seeking to defend Himself, serving as the sacrifice to the zenith of the mimetic cycle and the height of Dionysian indulgence. By being the sacrifice, He quelled the power of the patterns, stripping them of authority through the offering of Himself. Yet this is incomplete without the victory of the resurrection, which turns the Dionysian method on its head and renders mimetic violence without power. The triumph of Christ is that through His resurrection He undermines man's very desire to be his own god, opening the way by which man might be united to God Himself, completely subsisted in the eternal bond of theosis, and without desire to will against the ordinances of the Creator. The wounded traveler is brought to health; the stone that was rejected becomes the cornerstone.

In the first parable, we consider the nature of our fallen state and the great and strange mercy of God, who, coming to us in a form we did not perceive as worthy, nonetheless brought our souls to a state of health and bliss. In the second, we encounter the story of salvation, told from the perspective of God's continual goodness toward us even though by our wrath we sought to frustrate the glory of God. They tell of the mystery of our Faith, made by the confession of the Apostle Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."⁵⁴ We are therefore confronted with a single means of answer, for if man having sought to deny God was still so greatly pursued by Him, the only true response could be to turn back unto Him in surrender, to

⁵⁴1 Cor. 15:3-4

seek to be the people of whom it is written, “Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

We have considered here the place of violence in two parables and, more significantly, the relationship of these parables to the greater unfolding of God’s redemptive work toward man. It is fitting, though sobering, to conclude this thesis and exercise in exegesis with such themes. For the Scripture does not let us escape the suffering of the Servant who came into our midst, nor does it let us loose ourselves from the realities of pain and death brought into the world by sin. The whole of the narrative turns on the cry of justice welling up from the very creation, as Paul writes to the Romans, “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God,” and as God spoke to Cain, “And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”⁵⁶ The earth cried out the violence of the age, as Habakkuk resounded, “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!”⁵⁷ But then came the promises of God made unto His people, those known and unknown, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”⁵⁸ By His mercy He extended to us the joy of salvation, in spite

⁵⁵Jer. 31:4

⁵⁶Rom. 8:19, Gen. 4:10

⁵⁷Hab. 1:2

⁵⁸Isa. 40:1

of the violence within our hearts and the violence we sought to execute against Him, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”⁵⁹ Therefore it is left to us to respond to this great mystery, for the Bridegroom says, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”⁶⁰ It is into His hands we must commit our spirits, He who “was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” now and in the age to come.⁶¹

⁵⁹Rom. 5:8

⁶⁰Apoc. 1:18

⁶¹Isa. 53:5

Conclusion

I have attempted in this thesis an experiment in exegetical interpretation that conforms to the pre-Cartesian method of understanding Scripture as a window into itself, a Text that reads us more than we read it. Enlightenment ideals stripped us of the tendency to allow the senses of the Scripture to be imparted in a single word, replacing it instead with a hermeneutic of mechanical parts, a Text that can be broken down into composite pieces, pulled apart, and then built back up. It is, ultimately, a soulless and thoughtless form of criticism. The Bible is not a textbook where in God is proved to us in a rational manner. The Bible is the story of God's engagement with His creation, a poetic narrative, fertile ground from which the fruits of righteousness may grow. This process is not found in the agency of man, but in the working of the Holy Ghost, who illumines and inspires interpretation to be a faithful articulation of the whole Scripture, not merely a part stripped from its context. It was to this end that this thesis was endeavored.

In the opening chapter, I considered the progression and focus of patristic and medieval exegetical styles, in particular engaging their concern with the personhood of Christ and the question of *praxis* in relation to a life lived in submission to God. Beginning with the earliest documents, I briefly summarized glimpses of varying theologians up to the cusp of modernity, demonstrating a familiarity with the exegetical tradition up to that point as a means of informing my own interpretive exercise in the remaining chapters.

In the second chapter, I engaged two parables concerned with eschatological questions, the Parable of the Marriage Feast and the Parable of the Ten Virgins. In both, I emphasized the instruction inherent in both that our admittance into the church of God does not guarantee admittance into the Church of God, that our works are indicative of a faith taken root within us, and that the certainty of Christ's return should keep us in a holy fear to be found always about the business of our Eternal Father.

In the third chapter, I engaged two short parables about subversion, the Parable of the Lamp and the Parable of the Two Debtors. In both, I articulated the role of symbolism in the parables, how numerology and tropes contribute to the insistence Christ makes both of a light given to the Jews and to the Gentiles. The light stands paradoxically both as glorification and judgment. The debt forgiven stands paradoxically both as the weight of glory and the weight of forgiveness. In these shorter parables, Christ revealed the grafting nature of the kingdom, the incorporation of all men into the sons of God.

In the fourth chapter, I engaged violence in the Parable of the Good Samaritan and in the Parable of the Householder. This is the darkest of themes in the parables, though the most significant, for it addresses both our depravity against our own created self and our willingness to reject our Creator to the point of murder to appease the violence that governs our hearts. I considered first the nature of violence waged against our souls, then the violence waged against God, and concluded by pointing to the glory of God in trampling over our wickedness through the power of life.

I have approached the parables in this way as a means to suggest a stronger method of interpretation than modern homiletics tends toward. The state of the modern homily is a concerning one, for it often tends to focus on either application-driven content that strays far from the Scripture itself or to the theatrical, attempting to inject into the Text a life that is perceived to be absent. But “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” and why do we attempt to futilely inject a life that we have no power to give into the midst of where Life already is?¹ The attempt of modern homiletics to relativize the Scripture is ultimately an exercise in attempting to recast it in our own image, resulting in a dull and lifeless interpretation that cannot sustain a community of faith for long before it fragments or turns stagnant. It is this egoistic approach to the Scripture that is perhaps explanatory of the modern rhythm of church divisions in the Protestant tradition. We are no longer a people of whom it could be said,

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel ... And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. ... And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.²

We do not delight in the Word; we do not understand that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”³

¹Luke 24:5

²Neh. 8:1, 6, 12

³Luke 4:4

We must then strive boldly for a nobler way and a truer reading. We must learn what it is to make the Word the lamp that goes before us to illumine the path. We must read as ones untimely born, who through humility recognize that it is only by the overwhelming grace and goodness of God that we are able to make intelligible those things hidden since the foundation of the world. This is the poetry of God: man journeying the creation in constant engagement with His Spirit and His Text, dead to the violence of the flesh, a life now hid with Christ in God.⁴

⁴Col. 3:3

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