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Theology as queen of hospitality

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Babette's Feast: theology as queen of hospitality

One of my favourite movies is Gabriel Axel's 1987 film, *Babette's Feast*. It tells the story of the French cook, Babette, who, through circumstances of the French-German war of 1870-71, ends up in a reclusive and ingrown Lutheran sect on the Danish coastline. Something is clearly awry with the sect. Life is not as it should be. The rugged physical shape of the Danish landscape fits the harsh realities of the community, in which time appears to have torn relationships, and in which ascetic practices, separated from the religious focus of the community's founder, have made people lose their vision of a life that is true, good, and beautiful. The small hamlet should be a paradise of fellowship. Instead, gossip, hatred, sexual infidelity, intolerance, fraud, and theft have incapacitated the community. The members of the tiny village consider earthly love 'of scant worth and merely empty illusion', recounts the narrator of the film.[1]

Few places seem more inhospitable than this small sectarian community on the coast of Jutland. It is nonetheless this unlikely place into which the French cook, Babette, gets catapulted. Martina and Philippa, daughters of the sect's founder, warmly welcome the bedraggled stranger as she enters their home. She is received as their guest and takes her place as the maid of the house. While Martina and Philippa are aware that their guest is able to cook, they do not realize that in reality she is a master chef who has served in the most prestigious Parisian restaurant, the Café Anglais. Babette enters the tiny Lutheran village as stranger and guest, but she ends up organizing a lavish French dinner for them. In self-denying love, Babette gives every last penny of her wealth to express her gratitude to the group of people who, despite their internal animosity, have accepted her as one of their own. The dinner not only involves a remarkable role reversal – with Babette turning out as the queen of hospitality and the community being served as her much beloved guests – but it also throws into disarray their engrained asceticism. Babette demonstrates her ability, in the words of one of the dinner guests, to 'transform a dinner into a kind of love affair that made no distinction between

1 I have discussed the eucharistic implications of *Babette's Feast* in *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 219-20.

bodily appetite and spiritual appetite'.[2] The hospitality and love which Babette offers in this sumptuous feast becomes the occasion for the villagers to deal with their mutual grievances and to offer each other forgiveness and reconciliation. Much of the film is taken up by the delicate intricacies of the meal itself, through which the twelve disciples of the community undergo their transformation.[3]

The discipline of theology is in some important ways like Babette. Theology – and I am locating myself here within the Protestant and evangelical spectrum of this enterprise – has come to resemble Babette, a bedraggled refugee. She has long forgotten her former glorious position as the master chef of Parisian cuisine – the queen of hospitality. To be sure, there is a great deal of theology being practised within evangelical circles. Judging both by numerical quantity and academic quality, it seems that evangelicalism has greater hope for the future than ever before. I am nonetheless not among the optimists in terms of the future of evangelical theology.[4] The reason for my lack of optimism lies in our cultural captivity, a cultural captivity that I am less than confident evangelicalism is able to transcend successfully. For theology to return to her former role as queen of hospitality, she needs to be in a position to offer hospitality. Babette, upon her arrival at the coastal village in Denmark, had severed all links with her French homeland. The only connection she retained with her Parisian past was in the form of a lottery ticket, which a friend in Paris renewed for her every year. It wasn't until she received a letter in the mail, indicating that she had won the lottery, that her position suddenly changed, and that she had the financial means to host this elaborate meal, worth the entire lottery of 10,000 francs. Put crassly, I am not convinced that evangelicalism has won the lottery. Put more theologically with a bit more nuance, the question is whether or not God in his providence has traditioned to us as evangelicals the means by which theology can reposition herself as the queen of hospitality.

If this essay is beginning to look like it might turn into a rather inward-looking affair, a private exercise in navel gazing, perhaps, let me state up front that this will only be partially true. It is true in the sense that I do plan to engage in some self-analysis. It is also true in the sense that I want to look at some historical theological developments that I believe have contributed to the bedraggled

2 The comment is made by General Löwenhielm during the dinner that Babette has prepared.

3 One of the twelve guests, General Löwenhielm, is actually an outsider to the community. Throughout the meal, this twelfth guest clearly behaves as a stranger. Familiar with the intricacies of Parisian cuisine, he is the only one who truly appreciates the generous character of the meal. This outsider is needed to complete the community (as a community of twelve) and to assist them in their transformation, even as he himself also comes to see his life in an entirely new perspective.

4 David F. Wells presents a similar analysis in *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For a more optimistic approach, see Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995); idem, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996).

state of the queen of hospitality. In what follows, therefore, I am going back to the high and late Middle Ages, to trace the genealogy of the loss of Platonism and the rise of nominalism, both of which I believe lie at the root of theology's current state of affairs. I will also offer a brief critique of some developments in contemporary evangelicalism, which I see as compounding the sad state in which her majesty finds herself. All of this, however, serves a greater purpose: the restoration of theology as queen of the *civitas*, queen of the City of God. The broader cultural relevance will, I hope, become clear as I proceed. It is my belief that only by unshackling theology from her cultural captivity will she be able to function as she was meant to, namely, playing the role of hostess by convincing people of the reality of truth, by persuading them of the superiority of goodness, and by alluring them to the magnificent beauty of God – in short, by opening up to them the divine Love that God offers in Jesus Christ.[5] Theology's task, as I see it, is to be the queen of hospitality.

St. Thomas Aquinas: theology as queen of the sciences

Those familiar with the history of Christian thought will no doubt have picked up on the play on words in the title of this essay. In referring to theology as 'queen of hospitality', I am calling to mind the medieval understanding of theology as 'queen of the sciences'. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), when asking the question whether or not theology (*sacra doctrina*) is nobler than the other sciences, answers with an unequivocal affirmative. Using the Book of Proverbs to illustrate his point, St. Thomas comments: 'Other sciences are called the handmaidens of this one: *Wisdom sent her maids to invite to the tower* (Prov. ix.3).'[6] Thomas recognizes the knowledge that theology gives us as wisdom, and he looks to the other, philosophical, sciences as theology's 'handmaidens'. Theology, he argues, is nobler for several reasons. First, unlike the other sciences, theology receives its certainty from divine knowledge. Second, theology deals with things that are more sublime than the objects that the other sciences investigate. And, finally, unlike any other science, theology has eternal bliss for its purpose. 'Hence', Thomas concludes, 'it is clear that from every standpoint, [sacred doctrine] is nobler [*dignior*] than other sciences.'[7] It seems obvious, to St. Thomas, that theology is

5 Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. D.C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004).

6 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* [ST], trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger, 1948; reprint, Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), I, q.1, a.5. I have used this edition for all translations of the ST.

7 Ibid. Aidan Nichols translates *dignior* as 'more valuable' (*Discovering Aquinas: An Introduction to His Life, Work, and Influence* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 172. Cf. ST I, q. 1, a.8: 'But sacred doctrine makes use even of human reason, not, indeed, to prove faith (for thereby the merit of faith would come to an end), but to make clear other things that are put forward in this doctrine. Since therefore grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the natural bent of the will ministers to charity. Hence the Apostle says: *Bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ* (2 Cor. x.5).'

the queen of the sciences.

St. Thomas is able to make his argument about the exalted place that theology occupies on the basis of two presuppositions, both of which he makes explicit. The first, rather obvious one, is that theology is a science, which derives from the principles of God's own knowledge and of the knowledge that the blessed departed possess, and which God in turn reveals to us.[8] And so, if theology operates on the basis of God's revelation in Christ through the Scriptures, Aquinas concludes that theology is properly scientific. It acquires knowledge by drawing conclusions from God's revelation. Needless to say, St. Thomas's notion of *scientia* is not that of our contemporary near-equation between 'science' and 'natural science'. For St. Thomas, theology is scientific because it properly derives knowledge (*scientia*) from the revelation of God. Based on this Thomist understanding of sacred doctrine, a contemporary evangelical theologian like Kevin Vanhoozer is able to conclude, 'Christian theology is scientific in the sense that it seeks to engage a particular reality – the communicative action of God – according to its distinct nature. God is knowable only to the extent that he *gives* himself to be known under the form of Jesus' humanity and the human words of Scripture. Sacred doctrine is thus the *scientia* of divine discourse.'[9] In short, I am simply drawing attention here to the obvious truth that we have to be willing to defend that theology is a science if we insist that she is the *queen* of the sciences.

The second presupposition that underlies the exalted place St. Thomas assigns to sacred doctrine is a rather clear distinction between the realms of nature and grace. For Thomas, the difference between philosophy and theology is that philosophy operates on the basis of reason alone, while theology takes its starting point in revelation, which is apprehended by faith. We can think here of Thomas's well-known example that the oneness of God is something we can deduce philosophically from reason alone, while the Trinitarian nature of God is something we can know only through faith. In itself, the distinction that St. Thomas is making here – between nature and grace, philosophy and theology, reason and faith – is not that revolutionary. Some sort of distinction between the two had been common ever since Christians started asking themselves the question how their faith related to the knowledge of non-Christians. It is a question that has occupied the minds of the Church's theologians ever since at the least the second century.[10] Still, there are some unique aspects to the way in which Thomas relates philosophy and theology. First, the thirteenth century was the age in which Aristotle was being rediscovered in the Western world. Thomas

8 ST I, q.1, a.2.

9 Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 248. John I. Jenkins discusses at some length St. Thomas's approach to *scientia* in sacred doctrine in *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 51-77.

10 Cf. Craig D. Allert, *Revelation, Truth, Canon and Interpretation: Studies in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 138-55.

was on the cusp of new developments and was concerned that Christianity not be left in the dust. If Christians were to ignore the new wave of metaphysical insights coming from the rediscovery of Aristotle, they would no longer be able to integrate that which was most current in the philosophical thought of the day. Theology would, in effect, turn obsolete. 'That Aquinas boldly grasped the bull by the horns', explains Frederick Copleston, 'and utilised Aristotelianism in the building up of his own system was very far from being an obscurantist action: it was, on the contrary, extremely "modern" and was of the greatest importance for the future of Scholastic philosophy and indeed for the history of philosophy in general.'[11] So, Thomas revolutionized scholastic theology particularly through his ready use of Aristotelian philosophy. Second, because of this introduction of Aristotelian philosophy, which we witness on page after page in the *Summa Theologiae*, the nature – grace distinction became rather pronounced at times. We can see this, for example, when Thomas argues that philosophy, based on the realm of nature, has its own natural purpose or end; while theology has for its purpose a supernatural goal: eternal life, the vision of the very essence of God.[12]

So, two assumptions underlie Thomas's conviction that theology is queen of the sciences: (1) theology is a science; and (2) the realms of nature and grace need to be carefully distinguished. It seems to me that while there is value to both of these presuppositions, they did introduce into the Western mind an approach that over time would lead to problems, not only theologically, but also culturally. The first presupposition, that theology is a science, does have a great deal to commend itself – especially if we keep the term 'science' broad enough, which is what Aquinas did. If theology is a science, not in the way *we* understand science today (as an inductive discipline based on experimentation) but instead as any kind of discipline that uses argumentation to come to conclusions, then it becomes hard to avoid the conclusion that theology is, at least partially, a science.[13] And in that sense I have no quibble with Thomas's description of theology as queen of the sciences. At the same time, however, Marshall McLuhan has

11 Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. II/2 (New York: Image-Doubleday, 1963), 40-41.

12 Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, vol. 2, trans. James V. McGlynn (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), 224 (14.3), 'But the philosopher considers one thing as final good and the theologian another. For the philosopher considers as final good that which has a proportion to the human powers and exists in the act of man himself.... But the theologian considers as the final good that which is beyond the capacity of nature, namely, everlasting life, as has been said.'

13 For St. Thomas the term *scientia* is not identical to our term 'science'. For Thomas, *scientia* can mean (1) any kind of 'knowledge' deduced by argumentation from that which is known; or (2) a 'discipline', as in a body of knowledge that one teaches. See Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching: Introducing the* Summa Theologiae *of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 34, n. 13. Even today's 'performing arts' are included in Thomas's understanding of *scientia* in the sense of a 'discipline' (cf. ST I, q.1, a.2).

taught us that in a very real sense the medium *is* the message.[14] The way in which we do theology says something about what we believe about the *role* of theology and says something, too, about the *contents* of our theology. There is no denying that reading St. Thomas is quite different from reading, say, St. Augustine. The way in which St. Thomas did theology, especially his use of the method of disputation, was typical for the scholastic age of the high Middle Ages. The *methodology* used by scholasticism led to an approach to the Christian faith in which the intellect played perhaps too large a role.

Very early on in the *Summa*, Thomas asks the question whether theology should proceed by argument. His answer is revealing: 'As other sciences do not argue in proof of their principles, but argue from their principles to demonstrate other truths in these sciences: so this doctrine does not argue in proof of its principles, which are the articles of faith, but from them it goes on to prove something else; as the Apostle from the resurrection of Christ argues in proof of the general resurrection (1 Cor. xv).'[15] It seems to me fair to interrupt the Angelic Doctor at this point and to ask the question: 'But doesn't St. Paul do a great deal more than make rational arguments?' In other words, while argumentation may be one legitimate mode of doing theology, doesn't Thomas's approach to theology as a science introduce a certain intellectualism that prioritizes the mind too much over the will?[16] I want to be somewhat careful in my criticism here, not in the least because there is a great lack of nuance in much of today's disparagement of 'abstract theology', and because I believe there is value in St. Thomas's approach to theology as 'queen of the sciences'.[17] Nonetheless, it seems to me undeniable that this nomenclature moved theology away from its earlier more symbolic mode of expression to a dialectical and more rationalist methodology. It was a move, to use Henri de Lubac's words, 'from symbolism to dialectic'.[18]

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14 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding the Media: The Extensions of Man*, new ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960).

15 ST I., q.1, a.8.

16 St. Thomas himself seems to have been aware of this danger, as in his later work he appears to have given a more independent role to the will vis-à-vis the intellect. See Reinhard Hütter, 'The Directedness of Reasoning and the Metaphysics of Creation', in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 174-76.

17 Cf. the generally anti-theological stance in Carl Raschke's book, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). Hooking into Derrida's view of theology as an idolatrous 'naming' of God, Raschke insists that 'the One whose name is above all names must be honored not with sound and consistent theology, but with a contrite and humble heart' (ibid., 114). Raschke makes an appeal for 'the end of theology' (ibid., 121), insisting that theology 'seeks to prevent fragmentation. It strives to mold and regiment learners into a culture of scholastic self-sufficiency. Athens and Jerusalem are inextricably entangled with each other, and fatefully confused' (ibid., 169).

18 Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, with Richard Price, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (London: SCM, 2006), 221-47. Cf. Susan K. Wood, 'Henri de Lubac, SJ (1886-1991): Theologian of the Church', *Theology Today* 62 (2005), 324.

The title of 'queen' may sound great, but, whatever her position, the upshot was that theology became one of *many* sciences. As one scholar puts it, by the end of the sixteenth century, 'theology lost its hold on a culture whose substance it had once shaped. It became reduced to a science among others, with a method and object exclusively its own. Other sciences henceforth could freely ignore it.'[19]

At least as important as this move toward theology as an argumentative discipline was the strong distinction between nature and grace. To be sure, St. Thomas had built in clear reservations that protected the unity of the two realms. For example, while he argued that philosophy (the realm of nature) had its own natural ends, distinct from the supernatural goal of eternal blessedness, he made clear that this did not imply that the two realms were hermetically sealed from each other. When God created human beings, he did not create them for purely natural ends, but always already had in mind humanity's eternal blessedness.[20] In his book on evil, *De malo*, Aquinas insisted that 'rational creatures surpass every other kind of creature in being capable of the highest good in beholding and enjoying God...'.[21] In short, Thomas didn't mean to hermetically separate the realm of nature from that of grace.[22] Unfortunately, as we will see, his disciples didn't always remain true to the nuanced way in which Thomas had put things.

The shift from Platonism to nominalism

This twofold development – an overemphasis on the scientific nature of theology, on the one hand, and a separation of the realms of nature and grace, on the other hand – would have serious consequences for the development of intellectual history, as we will see shortly. Before I go there, however, I need to make a few more comments about developments in the high and late Middle Ages.

By looking to theology as queen of the sciences, St. Thomas introduced a ten-

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19 Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 189.

20 'Omnis intellectus naturaliter desiderat divinae substantiae visionem.' English translation taken from Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles. Book Three, Part I: Providence*, trans. and introd. Vernon J. Bourke (Garden City, NY: Hanover; reprint, Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1975) III.57.4.

21 *De malo*, q.5, a.1, as quoted from Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan, ed. and introd. Brian Davies (New York: Oxford, 2003), 234. As a strong defender of the need for divine grace, Thomas immediately added that 'the sources from their own nature do not suffice to attain it, and they need the help of God's grace to attain it.' See de Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 117. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, ST I.ii, q.5, a.5, ad 2; I.ii, q. 91, a4, ad 3; idem, *Summa contra gentiles* 3.53.2.

22 Cf. Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, vol. II/2, 34-36. I would also grant that Thomas's appropriation of Aristotle implies to some degree a healthy counterbalance to an excessively Neoplatonic approach to creation, in which the world becomes a mere emanation from the divine, and which may lead to excessive sacramentalism. For an assessment of the scholastic humanist appropriation of human reason and of the autonomy of the natural realm, see R.W. Southern, *Foundations*, vol. 1 of *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 17-57.

sion, both in his own theology and in the Western cultural mindset. Briefly put, by turning theology into queen of the sciences, Thomas obscured an earlier vision of theology as queen of hospitality. Put somewhat differently, where the earlier tradition had borrowed from Plato, Thomas placed Aristotle alongside Plato. Let me try to unpack this a little bit. For most of the Christian tradition, Christianity had regarded Platonism a close cousin. At times, the relationship was so close, in fact, that it became somewhat unhealthy – perhaps even incestuous. By and large, however, Christian theology knew what to accept from Middle Platonists such as Philo (c. 20 BC – AD 50) and from neo-Platonists such as Plotinus (c. 204-70) and Proclus (411-85) and what to reject in them. There were at least three elements in the Christian faith, which Christians simply did not find back in the Platonic tradition, and which they felt was crucial to retain.[23] First, and most importantly, the Christian faith inherited from the Old Testament and from Judaism the belief that God did not *have* to create but was *free* to create. For Christians, creation was not simply an automatic or necessary emanation flowing from the being of God without an intervening act of his will. Creation was not simply an excretion, from pre-existing matter or spirit. Rather, God created the world freely, out of nothing – *ex nihilo*. While creating the world was certainly a fitting or congruous thing for God to do, it was not a necessary act. Creation did not simply emanate from the being of God.[24] Second, the neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation implied a hierarchy of being that posited a simple monad at the top of the hierarchy, followed by various divine Forms or Ideas, which in turn led to the lowest realm, the world of matter – a world mirroring the realm of Forms or Ideas. Platonism, in other words, functioned on the basis of a principle of absolute oneness: the one is the perfect, the many are the imperfect. Christians clashed sharply with Platonism on this point. They agreed that the Scriptures reflected the principle of hierarchy. They were ready, therefore, to ally themselves with neo-Platonism on this point. But they did not agree that the one implied perfection while the many implied imperfection. The doctrine of the Trinity provided a strong counter-balance to an unhealthy form of divine monarchy: Father, Son, and Spirit were consubstantial, Christian orthodoxy insisted. The one and the many both went back to the heart of who God was. Third, both of these first two principles – creation as a free act *ex nihilo* and the acceptance of plurality in the heart of being itself – led to a view of matter that was quite different from that of Platonism. Platonists could not possibly see matter as inherently

23 For the following three elements, I am taking my starting-point in Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 168.

24 Cf. Andrew Louth's comment: 'The clear assertion of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* which, from Athanasius onwards becomes an accepted premise in patristic theology, has disclosed an ontological gulf between God and the creature and, *a fortiori*, between God and the soul.... So [Athanasius] has, at one level at any rate, made a complete break with the Platonist tradition' (*The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981], 78).

good. Matter was the involuntary result of divine emanation and was located, therefore, at the very bottom of the hierarchy of being. And so nothing was better for the divine and immortal soul than to be freed from the material, mortal body. The Christian doctrine of creation, along with the strong belief in the resurrection of the body countered this Platonic suspicion of the material. Christians, throughout the Church's tradition, celebrated matter and particularly celebrated the body, as good gifts of the Creator God.[25]

All of this is simply to say that Christians knew when to say No to the Platonic worldview. There's a fairly common story doing the rounds among evangelicals, which blames most of the history of Christianity for uncritically accepting Platonism. Sometimes one almost gets the impression that it's only recently that some evangelicals have managed to recover the importance of the human body, and have finally overcome the evils of the Platonic tradition. That story says a great deal more about contemporary evangelicalism than it does about the history of Christian thought. While such evangelical accounts purport to be simply 'biblical', they in fact often work with a philosophical framework in which it is assumed that the relational language of the scriptures exhausts the character of God.[26] The result is a historicizing of our understanding of God and thus a loss of transcendence.[27] This approach ignores the fact that, by and large, Christians did reject the excesses of Platonism. They were keen to assert divine freedom – as shown particularly in creation and in the Incarnation. They were keen to assert the Trinitarian character of God. And they were keen to assert the goodness of the material order and so to celebrate their belief in the resurrection of the body and in an eschatological future of a new heaven *and* a new earth.[28]

But Christians were also careful not to overreact and simply denounce everything Platonic as incompatible with the gospel. There were several reasons why – despite the strong reservations that I have just listed – Christian theology continued to look to the Platonic tradition as in many ways an ally rather than an opponent. St. Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, continued this synthesis between Christianity and Platonism, which we need to recognize given

25 Even as Platonic a thinker as Gregory of Nyssa goes to great lengths defending the resurrection of the body, even if at times his Platonic convictions make it difficult for him to do so. See Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. Catharine Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980).

26 Both among advocates of a non-reductive physicalist anthropology and among open theists, the Christian tradition is often regarded as having fallen from its purely 'biblical' origins by being amalgamated with Platonism.

27 David Bradshaw, in his excellent book, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), traces the pre-Christian and Christian distinction between *ousia* (essence) and *energeia* (energy), with the Church fathers regarding the former as always remaining out of human reach. Some kind of distinction along these lines seems to me crucial to avoid the danger of collapsing the divine into the natural order.

28 Cf. Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 136-61.

his reputation as a champion of Aristotle. One of his most quoted authors was pseudo-Denys, a sixth-century Syrian monk, for whom the entire universe was one beautiful, harmonious whole, predicated on a hierarchy of being; and for whom the universe had not only come from God but would also return to him, by means of the deification of human beings. God had become human that humans might become divine. We could say that for Thomas, Denys was the theologian of divine hospitality. God opened his divine life for human beings to enter in. And Denys introduced to Thomas an approach that wasn't quite like that of the queen of the sciences. The theology that Thomas encountered in Denys was, instead, a queen of hospitality, a queen that was intent on drawing human beings into mystical union with God and ultimately into the divine life itself.[29] Already as a student of Albert the Great (c. 1206-80), Thomas acquainted himself with Denys's *On the Celestial Hierarchy*.[30] As a mature theologian, he wrote his commentary on Denys's *Divine Names*, which put beyond doubt his deep indebtedness to this mystical monk's Platonic worldview. We see the impact of Denys in Thomas's acknowledgement that there are limits to human knowledge of God: God's essence is inaccessible to us in our current condition, and he remains the Wholly Other one.[31] We see it in Thomas's insistence that all true being participates in God's being.[32] We see it in his understanding of salvation as a sharing by grace in the divine life – deification.[33] And, of course, we see it especially in the way in which he structured the entire *Summa* around the scheme of life both originating in God and returning to him.[34] For Thomas, all of life – and Christian theology particularly – served the ultimate end of eternal happiness in

29 For St. Thomas, in the hereafter, the illumination of the intellect by divine grace allows the created intellect to see the essence of God. 'By this light the blessed are made *deiform* – that is, like to God, according to the saying: *When He shall appear we shall be like to Him, and* [Vulg., *because*] *we shall see Him as He is* (1 John, ii.2)' (ST I, q.12, a.5). Cf. ST I-II, q.2, a.7; I-II, q.2, a.8; I-II, q.3, a.8.

30 Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas*, 5.

31 Cf. Karen Kilby, 'Aquinas, the Trinity and the Limits of Understanding', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 414-27.

32 For St. Thomas, God is being *per essentiam*, while humans merely share or participate in God's being analogically (ST I, q.3, a.4; I, q.6, a.4; I, q.13, a.5, I, q. 45, a.5). Cf. Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 99-100.

33 Cf. A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), 149-61.

34 The *Summa* is structured according to an *exitus-redditus* schema, in which the universe originates in God and returns to him. The *Prima Pars* deals with the doctrine of God and creation; the *Prima Secundae* explains human happiness and beatific bliss as the purpose of morality; the *Secunda Secundae* discusses the Christian virtues – faith, hope, and love – as the pathway of the human return to God; and the *Tertia Pars* presents an exposition of salvation in Christ, i.e., Christology proper and the sacraments.

the vision of God. St. Thomas remained a Platonist at heart.[35]

But we could say that by borrowing extensively also from Aristotle, St. Thomas drove a wedge into the classical Platonist-Christian synthesis. The wedge was the combination of the scientific character of theology and the sharp nature-grace distinction. The tension that this introduced into Thomas's theology, and over time into the Western cultural mindset, would ultimately lead to a rejection of the Platonic participatory worldview in favour of a celebration of an immanent or horizontal natural realm, able to function unencumbered by any interference from the outside. Soon, nominalist theologians began to question the Platonic participatory framework that had dominated the history of Christian thought from its inception.

In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308) attacked the first pillar of the traditional Platonist-Christian synthesis. This pillar was God's hospitality by which he graciously drew human beings toward full participation in his being. Scotus insisted that whether we talked about *God* as being or about *humans* as beings, there was no difference in the way we used the term 'being'. Put crudely, *we* had being in just the same way that *God* had being, too. Both appeared to exist in the same way. Scholars often speak of this approach to the divine-human relationship as 'univocity of being'.[36] When scholastic theologians came to see being as an overarching category that applied to God and humans in the same way, this meant, in effect, that they looked at human life as separate from the life of God. God and humans were distinct beings, each with their own, separate existence. As a result, it became impossible to hold on to the more Platonic worldview, which, by contrast, had viewed human beings as sharing or participating in God's own being. Univocity of being undermined a framework that looked at the natural world as charged with the grandeur of God's very own being.

A second pillar of the classical Platonist-Christian synthesis was undermined a little later when William of Ockham (d. 1347), Gabriel Biel (c. 1425-95), and others began to question Thomas's emphasis on the intellect and instead prioritized the divine will. Here the key question was: Does God will something because it is good, or is something good because God wills it? Those who emphasized the priority of the divine will argued the latter – something is good because God wills it. When these voluntarists accentuated the divine will to the point of arguing that, by his absolute power, God could do pretty much anything he willed, the question became unavoidable: If God's will is this arbitrary, can we still count

35 It is important to keep in mind that pseudo-Denys's mysticism is not individualist in character. See Denys Turner, 'How to Read the pseudo-Denys Today?' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 428-40. As Turner shows, Thomas's appropriation of Denys is judicious in that it doesn't undermine the centrality of the Church and the sacraments.

36 I discuss Scotus' understanding of univocity of being and his rejection of *analogia entis* in more detail in 'Accommodation to What? Univocity of Being, Pure Nature, and the Anthropology of St. Irenaeus', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006), 266-93.

on the stability of the world that he has made? The end result of the voluntarist position seemed a thoroughgoing scepticism.[37] How would one know that when God promised something, he would, in fact, do it? The stable, harmonious universe of the Middle Ages began to totter because of the instability of a capricious God on whom human beings could never quite count.[38] Louis Dupré puts it this way: 'The concept of an unrestricted divine power in the nominalist theologies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries weakened the intelligibility of the relation between Creator and creature.'[39]

The third and final pillar of the Platonist-Christian synthesis was perhaps the most crucial one that the late Middle Ages undermined. Platonism had always insisted that what makes some created objects similar to others is that they participate or share in a common, universal Form. Nominalists rejected this approach by insisting that the only reason why objects are similar to each other lies in the will of God. The fact that God creates Plato as similar to Socrates is not to say that there actually *is* something like a common humanity, something like a Platonic Idea or Form.[40] Universals, such as 'humanity', are just names or concepts that we apply to individual objects – hence the term nominalism, derived from the Latin word for 'name', *nomen*. Nominalism maintained that the eternal Platonic Forms or Ideas did not have real existence. It is fine to call Socrates and Plato 'humans' as they *appear* to share in a common humanity, but we should remember that this so-called 'humanity' is just that: appearance – no more. The implication of this philosophical position of nominalism was, to stick to our example, that Socrates and Plato did not have anything real in common. They did not truly share any commonality. The result was a fragmentation or atomizing of the natural world into a multitude of independent objects. Each separate fragment of this natural world was upheld merely by the will of an ultimately arbitrary God.

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37 St. Thomas's intellectualism prevents a voluntarist slide into scepticism. Thomas identifies God, truth, and being; he maintains that the good follows the truth of being: 'Although the good and the true are convertible with being, as to suppositum, yet they differ logically. And in this manner the true, speaking absolutely, is prior to good, as appears from two reasons. First, because the true is more closely related to being than is good. For the true regards being itself simply and immediately; while the nature of good follows being in so far as being is in some way perfect; for thus it is desirable. Secondly, it is evident from the fact that knowledge naturally precedes appetite. Hence, since the true regards knowledge, but the good regards the appetite, the true must be prior in idea to the good' (ST I, q.16, a.4). For Thomas, then, truth is more directly identified with being than is goodness. This implies a priority of the intellect over the will, which prevents us from viewing God as capricious, and which in turn prevents us from falling into scepticism.

38 Cf. G. van den Brink, 'De absolute en geordineerde macht van God: Opmerkingen bij de ontwikkeling van een onderscheid', *Nieuw Testamentisch Tijdschrift* 45 (1991), 205-22.

39 Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 174.

40 I am taking the example of Socrates and Plato from Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. III/1 (New York: Image-Doubleday, 1963), 69.

The abandonment of Platonism in favour of nominalism implied that the nature-grace distinction had turned into a dualism that was accepted as fact.[41] These changes in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries received an additional boost when in the next century neo-Thomist theologians such as Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534) and Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) hardened the division between the realms of nature and grace by insisting that the realm of nature – which was a realm of *pure* nature, unaffected by divine grace – had its own ends or purposes, quite separate from the realm of the supernatural.[42] The Western world would come to view nature as autonomous and independent from divine grace, thereby abandoning the view of theology as queen of hospitality. Hans Urs von Balthasar paints the cultural consequences in his wonderful book, *Love Alone Is Credible*:

> [W]henever the relationship between nature and grace is torn asunder in the sense of the... dialectical opposition between 'knowledge' and 'faith', worldly being will necessarily fall under the sign of the constant dominion of 'knowledge' and thus science, technology, and cybernetics will overpower and suffocate the forces of love within the world. The result will be a world without women, without children, without reverence for the form of love in poverty and humility, a world in which everything is viewed solely in terms of power or profit-margin, in which everything that is disinterested and gratuitous and useless is despised, persecuted, and wiped out, and even art is forced to wear the mask and the features of technique.[43]

Balthasar insists that Christocentric love – divine hospitality – lies at the centre of the universe and 'invites' and 'elevates' us to an 'inconceivable intimacy'.[44] Theology, from this perspective, has the calling to function as queen of hospitality.

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41 In what follows, I am using the term 'nominalism' to indicate the overall changes implied in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century transitions toward univocity of being, voluntarism, and epistemological nominalism. I am asking the reader to keep in mind that while there are close historical and conceptual links between voluntarism and nominalism, the connection between univocity of being and nominalism is more indirect. John Duns Scotus, for example, held to a realist rather than a nominalist understanding of universals.

42 See Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard, introd. Louis Dupré (New York: Herder & Herder – Crossroad, 2000), 105-83. For some of the more recent discussions on the controversy created by de Lubac's 1946 *Surnaturel*, see Boersma, 'Accommodation to What?'; Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 134-48; John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

43 Von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 142. For an excellent analysis of the cultural consequences of the modern nature-grace dualism, see Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003).

44 Von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 57.

Suggestions for the queen

It is one thing, of course, to present a theological and cultural analysis. It is another to present concrete suggestions for renewal. As indicated, at the heart of the modern malaise, I believe, lies a nature-grace dualism, which manifests itself in a rejection of Platonism and an embrace of nominalism. What I want to suggest, therefore, is that as evangelicals, we would do well to resist some of the philosophical tendencies current among the younger evangelicals and in the emergent church.[45] These currents seem to me directly linked with the late medieval move from Platonism to nominalism. Let me briefly illustrate what I mean with the help of a recent book by Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity*. Raschke's book offers a remarkably positive assessment of postmodernity, including the nominalist embrace of immanence and horizontalism.[46] Appealing to Gilles Deleuze's concept of a 'plane of immanence', Raschke insists that we need to overcome classical metaphysics, which used to order existence as a 'hierarchy of levels, which require the usual metaphysical differentiation between immanence and transcendence'.[47] Vertical thinking, maintains Raschke, 'is the cognitive pattern of the modernist worldview'. Evangelicals, he suggests, have 'the ingrained habit of conceptualizing a church as a vertical structure, with God at the top, the denominational administrative hierarchy just below, the pastors and the individual governing bodies struck [sic] smack in the middle, and the congregation along with its outreach at the lower tier'.[48] The Reformation, despite its decentralizing of clerical authority, has not gone far enough, because it did not 'bring about a return to the primitive or first-century church, which the Reformers had set about to achieve'.[49] Raschke's book reads like an extended plea for postmodern immanence and horizontal relationality with hardly a critical comment directed toward postmodern

45 For an extensive critique, see D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

46 Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). I am using Raschke's book as an example because as an adjunct faculty member at Mars Hill Graduate School (Seattle) he is one of the most philosophically and theologically astute spokesmen for the so-called 'emergent church networks'.

47 Raschke, *Next Reformation*, 67. Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'The Plane of Immanence', in *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 43: 'Where there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is religion; and there is Philosophy whenever there is immanence, even if it functions as arena for the agon and rivalry....' See also Gilles Deleuze, 'Immanence: A Life', in *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (New York: Zone, 2001), 25-33.

48 Raschke, *Next Reformation*, 154. Raschke does acknowledge the vertical dimension, but most of his discourse clearly intends to undermine it.

49 Ibid., 155-56.

discourse.[50] To be sure, much of his criticism of the rationalism of modernity, and its influence on evangelicalism, seems to me on target. But I am puzzled by the mostly uncritical acceptance, even celebration, of contemporary postmodern philosophical discourse. And so, when Raschke insists that we should accept Nietzsche's claim that 'nihilism begins with Plato', I get more than a little anxious;[51] and when I hear him make a plea for nominalism as the true precursor of postmodernity, I am positively beginning to yearn for the stability that Platonism offered to Christian theology.[52]

Evangelicals would do well to repudiate the dilemma of modernity versus postmodernity, particularly since both are the natural outgrowth of the abandonment of Platonism in favour of nominalism. Instead, it seems to me that the analysis as I have presented it here contains the germs of what I am hoping is a helpful theological antidote to our nominalist and immanentist culture. Let me make three concrete suggestions to illustrate how theology might again take up its role as queen of hospitality. The first suggestion I want to make has to do with the regal role of theology. The last thing theology should do is to acquiesce in her dethronement as queen. Surely, there is no greater good than eternal life and the vision of God. There seems to me no greater role, therefore, than that of a discipline that plays the role of hostess, drawing people into the truth, the goodness, and the beauty of divine Love. Babette – whom I have taken as symbolic for the role of theology – is key to the transformation of the small Danish fishing hamlet by sacrificing her last penny for the sake of the transformation of those around her. The hostess of theology can only be faithful to her task by insisting that she does, indeed, play the role of queen. To give but one example, mathematics is a wonderful discipline. But to allow her to usurp the throne of the queen would be to accept the nominalist worldview with its attendant problems of uninhibited scientific and technological development. John Milbank is right, therefore, when he insists: 'The pathos of modern theology is its false humility. For theology, this must be a fatal disease.... If theology no longer seeks to position, qualify or criticize other discourses, then it is inevitable that these discourses will position theology.'[53]

At the same time, the role of theology as queen with regard to other disciplines does not mean that the authority of theology is a purely extrinsic authority with the right of hurling edicts to those at the lower end of the totem pole. It is precisely when we understand divine authority in a purely extrinsic fashion, separate from what goes on in the natural order and separate, too, from what goes on in the actual life of the Tradition of the Church and of the eucharistic life of the community, that we ignore the persuasive work of the Holy Spirit who

50 It isn't until the last few pages of the book that Raschke finally expresses a few reservations (ibid., 213-15).

51 Ibid., 79.

52 Ibid., 80.

53 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 1.

convinces, persuades, and allures from within.[54] When we no longer regard this world as participating in the life of God, authority turns into an arbitrary force belonging to an external, supernatural order that is completely alien from the natural order. It may well be that, historically speaking, we see such extrinsic approaches when Catholicism began to locate authority in the supernatural order of the hierarchy[55] and when Protestantism isolated the Bible as the only source of authority separate from the actual Tradition of the Church, and separate, too, from the life of the eucharistic community. We could perhaps say that in Catholicism this development climaxed in the declaration of papal infallibility in the nineteenth century; while in Protestantism the development climaxed in a biblicist fundamentalism that reduced Christianity to a religion of the book. In both cases, we end up with a largely extrinsic understanding of authority.[56] If theologians are to fulfill their role well, they need to remember that theology's authority is an authority of servitude. The queen of hospitality serves to draw people into the divine future of truth, goodness, and beauty.[57]

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54 At the same time, we should not only watch for the Scylla of an extrinsicist command ethic, but also for the Charybdis of an antinomian appeal to the Spirit, which is the result of John Milbank's appropriation of Platonism. See Hans Boersma, 'On the Rejection of Boundaries: Radical Orthodoxy's Appropriation of St. Augustine', *Pro Ecclesia* 15 (2006), 418-47.

55 Cf. Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (San Diego: Basilica; Needham Heights: Simon & Schuster, 1966), 177-89, 328-38.

56 Cf. von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 147-48: 'The point of integration... can lie only in revelation itself, which comes from God and provides its own integrating center. This center is set too low, however, in the ordinary Catholic understanding, according to which the Magisterium provides a unity sufficient to gather up the multiplicity of the dogmas to be believed. But the Magisterium can justify presenting them as things to be believed only insofar as it was founded by Christ, who for his part justified himself as the one sent by the Father. The Church's formal authority, like Christ's, is ultimately credible only as the manifestation of the majestic glory of divine love. But this gives it real credibility. The center is also set too low by the alternative doctrine we find in orthodox Protestantism. Instead of office, it designates the Word of Scripture as the reference point, which bears witness to itself, interprets itself, and demands obedience – the Word in its unresolvable existential duality of Old and New Covenants, justice and grace, and law and Gospel. Though this may be the formal structure of Scripture, Scripture as a whole is nevertheless only a witness to the concrete incarnate God, who interprets himself in relation to the absolute love of God.'

57 Cf. Benedict XVI's comments in his recent encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*: 'The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. Ps 73 [72]:23-28)' (par. 17).

Second, one of the areas in theology that requires particular attention today is the doctrine of the sacraments. The loss of Platonism and the nominalist turn have undermined the basic building blocks of a sacramental mindset. And we can understand why: when nature gets separated from the supernatural, and is no longer regarded as being upheld by the grace of God and as participating in the life of God, the created order comes to stand on its own. It no longer points beyond itself, and thus loses its sacramental character. The Catholic scholar, Henri de Lubac, has explained how this loss of a sacramental mindset came about. Prior to the twelfth century, when people spoke about the 'mystical body', they were thinking about Christ's body received in the Eucharist. After the twelfth century, a decisive shift took place in this understanding of the 'mystical body'.[58] This phrase now came to refer not to the sacrament, but to the hierarchical institution of the Church itself. What this meant is that the focus shifted *from* the sacrament *to* the Church.[59] Church and Eucharist became separate. Susan Wood puts it this way:

> The unity of the Church was no longer understood sacramentally, scripturally, or eschatologically, but was modeled on a society with its leader, whether pope or emperor. In Roman Catholicism, the mystical body became a visible society, while, under the influence of Wyclif, Hus, Luther, and Calvin, the mystical body of Christ became completely dissociated from the visible church, leading to a doctrine of the invisible church.[60]

What Wood, basing herself on de Lubac, is saying is that the Body of Christ in the Eucharist became something quite different from the Body of Christ in the Church. Church and Eucharist no longer provided an identity for one another. Whereas prior to the twelfth century the Eucharist constituted the Church, after this period Eucharist and Church became distinctly separate. It is Platonism that allowed Christian theology to look to the material world as an icon or a window into eternity. And it is the *rejection* of Platonism that led to a disenchanted world, from which all mystery was dispelled, and in which the sacraments could not possibly hold a place of truly ecclesial significance. Urgent reflection is needed,

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58 Cf. Lisa Wang's summarizing statement: 'De Lubac contends that from Augustine's time to the Carolingian age, theological discourse maintained a fine and even balance in its approach to the relationship between the historical body on the cross, the sacramental body on the altar, and the ecclesial body of the church. But from the eleventh century onwards, the growing predominance of the phrase *verum corpus* had the effect not only of uniting the historical and sacramental body, but also of widening the gap between the sacramental and ecclesial body – driving a wedge between the church and the eucharist' ('*Sacramentum Unitatis Ecclesiasticae*: The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac', *Anglican Theological Review* 85 [2003]: 151).

59 Henri de Lubac makes his historical theological observations in *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et l'Église au moyen âge* (Paris: Aubier, 1944). For the English translation, see footnote 18 above.

60 Wood, 'Henri de Lubac', 323-24.

therefore, on De Lubac's principle that the Eucharist makes the Church, and that, in turn, the Church makes the Eucharist. Such reflection is particularly necessary for evangelicals, for it would not only inject an antidote against the malaise of nominalism, but it might also lead to a fruitful ecumenical discussion on the nature of the Church, a discussion from which Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism may all benefit.[61]

The story of *Babette's Feast* is reminiscent of St. Luke's account of the two travellers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). They, like the small Danish sect, are joined by a stranger, the grace of whose presence they are unable to recognize, wrapped up as they are in their grief. After they have kindly taken Jesus into their home, Jesus turns from a mere stranger into the host: 'Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them' (24:30).[62] Significantly, it is in the breaking of the bread that Cleopas and his friend recognize Jesus (24:31, 35). It is the meal with the stranger that transforms them, that makes them recognize their Lord, and that makes them return to Jerusalem, to the Church of the apostles. For Luke, as for Babette, the Eucharist makes the Church. A reappraisal of the positive elements of Platonism, therefore, would enable us to return to a more biblical view that appreciates the functioning of material elements as windows into the supernatural life of Jesus Christ himself and would allow us to regain the centrality of the Eucharist as a truly sacramental celebration.

The third way in which theology could show herself to be queen of hospitality is by a strong endorsement of the current trend toward a renewed appreciation of spiritual or theological interpretation. We are witnessing the beginnings of a reappropriation of interpretation as primarily a Spirit-guided, ecclesial enterprise, which recognizes that the historical-critical quest for historical or literal authorial intent has in many ways proven illusive.[63] Evangelicals are becoming increasingly aware of the need for change in this area. Over the past few years, the first volumes in the new 'Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible' se-

61 For an outstanding example of such dialogue, see Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993). McPartlan makes the interesting observation that the current Pontiff, Benedict XVI, holds to a view of the relationship between Church and Eucharist that is very similar to that of de Lubac (pp. 285-87). For a full discussion of Joseph Ratzinger's ecclesiology, see Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

62 Amy G. Oden points out that the Fathers of the early Church noticed the fluidity between the identities of stranger/guest and host: 'Because the guest is actually more than just a guest, but is Christ, then there is another surprise as well. Christ becomes the host and the host becomes the guest' (*And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2001], 51).

63 This is not to deny that the historical-critical method has contributed genuine insights. I am merely drawing attention here to the tendency in historical-critical scholarship to work on the presupposition of an autonomous natural realm, separated from supernatural influence. Such isolation is unable to do justice to the ecclesial context of the scriptures.

ries have been published.[64] Two years ago, Baker Academic published the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*.[65] And at the last few years' annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion, the sessions on theological interpretation of Scripture were an obvious draw. Finally, the new 'Evangelical Ressourcement' series, published by Baker Academic, is born out of a deep desire within evangelicalism to go back to the Church Fathers in the belief that they are more than just an ancient reliquary.[66] According to the advertising, the series is 'grounded in the belief that there is a wealth of theological, exegetical, and spiritual resources from the patristic era that is relevant for the Christian church today and into the future'. Also in this area of spiritual interpretation, we can hardly do better than take our cue from Henri de Lubac and the *Ressourcement* theologians associated with him.[67] A return to theological or spiritual interpretation of Scripture may well form the beginning of a re-evaluation of the modern nature-grace dualism.[68] For such an interpretation of the Bible takes the literal meaning of the Bible to point beyond itself to a spiritual meaning, just as the Platonist-Christian synthesis saw nature as pointing beyond itself to the supernatural world. Such a return to theological interpretation would be a strong encouragement for evangelical-Catholic dialogue.[69]

The Reformers' apprehensions regarding allegory and their insistence on

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64 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005); Peter Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006); Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007).

65 Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; London: SPCK, 2005).

66 The first volume in the series is D.H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). The second volume, written by Craig D. Allert and dealing with canon development in the early Church, has just been published (*A High View of Scripture? Biblical Authority and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007]).

67 Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2 vols., trans. Mark Sebanc and E.M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998, 2000). Cf. Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

68 It remains to be seen how this turn toward theological interpretation works itself out. R.R. Reno rightly cautions that theology should not simply be the result of exegesis, but should form the very matrix of one's exegetical method. 'Biblical Theology and Theological Exegesis', in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, et al. (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 397-400.

69 Cf. the comment of Joseph Ratzinger that 'the extent of the Word's meaning cannot be reduced to the thoughts of a single author in a specific historical moment; it is not the property of a single author at all; rather, it lives in a history that is ever moving onward and, thus, has dimensions and depths of meaning in past and future that ultimately pass into the realm of the unforeseen' ('What in Fact Is Theology?' in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, ed. Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür, trans. Henry Taylor [San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005], 32-33).

the literal meaning of the text may have been quite understandable against the backdrop of the late medieval context. At the same time, in hindsight we should not hesitate to identify the collusion on this point between Protestantism and a move from Platonism toward nominalism. With the natural realm coming into its own in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the logical result was a scientific method of interpretation that looked to the Bible as just one other object to analyze according to the strict dictates of the immanent or horizontal relationships of cause and effect. To have found the literal or historical meaning of the text now meant to have grasped it. The principle that on one's own – apart from any ecclesial context – an individual could interpret the Bible meant, in effect, a removal of the Bible from the Church to the natural realm of academia, where scientific methodologies would determine the meaning of the text.[70] I trust it will be clear that I am not making a plea for a postmodern approach to interpretation. Rather, I am asking that we consider the difference between theology as queen of the sciences and theology as queen of hospitality. When theologians interpret the Scriptures, they do so from within the Church, in order to convince people of the truth of God's hospitality in Christ, to persuade them that the Scriptures present a call to goodness and holiness, and to allure them with the prospect of participation in the beauty of eternal life.

Abstract

This essay presents an appeal for theology to reassume her regal position by realigning herself with the classical Platonist-Christian synthesis. Both St. Thomas's highlighting of theology as a science and his at times emphatic nature-grace distinction led to a move 'from symbolism to dialectic' (Henri de Lubac). The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed an even stronger erosion of a Platonic participatory framework through the univocal theology of Duns Scotus, the voluntarism of William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel, and the nominalist epistemology of Ockham and others. Later Neo-Thomist scholastic theologians (Cajetan, Suárez) entrenched the separation between nature and the supernatural with their putative realm of 'pure nature'. Contemporary evangelicalism's embrace of nominalism and postmodernism as its logical philosophical conclusion must be countered by a *ressourcement* of the Platonist-Christian synthesis, (1) reasserting theology's role as queen of divine hospitality; (2) re-envisioning a sacramental ontology; and (3) reintroducing spiritual biblical interpretation.[71]

70 Cf. Hans Boersma, 'Spiritual Imagination: Recapitulation as an Interpretive Principle', in *Imagination and Interpretation: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Hans Boersma (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 13-33.

71 This essay was first presented as the Civitas Lecture at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, MI, on February 28, 2006. I have benefited a great deal from the valuable input provided by John Stackhouse and Jens Zimmermann.