of his resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of the Father, or of his future coming as judge, or of the manner of life that is “worthy of God.” Indeed, methodological consistency demands of the historian the bracketing or screening of such language: that may be what Paul said and thought, but as to its truth, as a historian, I cannot judge.

What happens when the historical approach to Scripture is considered to be the only legitimate approach? Inevitably, the conversation between Scripture and theology is adversely affected. At best, biblical scholars have little to offer theologians and pastors, since their approach works only to describe what the compositions might have meant in the past and not what truth they may have for the present. At worst, theology is made captive to the historical approach to Scripture, because of the exclusive claims to competency asserted by scholars who are historians but not theologians, and thereby theologians either accept the reductionistic (historical) version of the resurrection, for example, as what Scripture actually teaches, or accept one of several versions of a “theology of the New Testament” that is itself simply another version of reduction through history.

Learning to read Scripture not simply as a record of the past, but as compositions that speak prophecy to the present — speak the truth about the presence and power of God at work to transform the world in the communities reading these texts — will not be easy. It will demand of us the humility to learn from readers of the past. It will require of us the learning of skills and of sensibilities that are not professionally rewarded. It will require of us the willingness to exegete the complexities of contemporary human experience as well as the complexities of ancient language. It will ask of us that we become theologians rather than historians.

Taking the creed seriously will not, I think, make things easier. In many ways, it will make things more difficult. But it may also make things in the church more truthful. And it may be a way in which we can once more put together a commitment to orthodox doctrine and a generous humanity, a love for the content of the church’s faith as well as a passionate witness to the life that faith enables.

Chapter 5

The Metaphysics of Co-Inherence

A Meditation on the Essence of the Christian Message

ROBERT BARRON

A round the year 750, scribes, artists, and illustrators of the monasticity of Iona, situated on an island just off the western coast of England, produced a book of the Gospels. We know that, for a time, it rested at the shrine of St. Brigid in Kildare, where a visitor referred to it as “the High Relic of the Western World.” A twelfth-century pilgrim to Ireland gave us a vivid description of its pages: “If you take the trouble to look very closely...you will notice such intricacies, so delicate, so subtle...so involved and bound together...that you will not hesitate to declare that all those things must have been the work not of men but of angels.” This remarkable sacred object is now known, from the last place that it rested, as the Book of Kells.

One of the most famous of its pages is the “Chi-Rho” page, the opening of the Gospel of Matthew. Sinuous lines cross one another, twisting, turning, overlapping, intertwining, forming tightly woven patterns. Often within an already densely textured design, a smaller and even more intricate pattern can be picked out. Animals abound (including two mice who tug at a consecrated host), and they find their place alongside human figures, who in turn are implicated in the structure of the letters. The playful, colorful, and interlacing style of the Book of Kells has been called typically Irish, and this may be so, but at a much more basic level it is Catholic and Christian.

Charles Williams, who was, along with J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, a member of the Oxford writers’ group the Inklings, claimed that the master idea of Christianity is co-inherence, by which he meant the
implication of the being of one in the being of the other, the intertwining and interlacing of reality. He saw it in the circuminnessio of the Trinitarian persons, in the coming-together of divinity and humanity in Jesus, in the dynamics of Christ’s atoning death, and in the corporate life of the Church, the way the members of the body of Christ bear each other’s burdens.2 Like the lines and patterns of the Book of Kells, reality, seen through Christian eyes, has a stubbornly co-inherent structure.

That co-inherence is metaphysically basic is the content of our catechisis and teaching; it is one way of stating the core belief that we Catholic Christians want to communicate to the next generations. I stand with Hans Urs von Balthasar in claiming that the most effective starting-point for our teaching and proclamation is the beauty of our message, a beauty very much like that of the Book of Kells: engrossing, fascinating, intricate, and deeply involving. When Charles Ryder, the narrator of Evelyn Waugh’s great Catholic novel Brideshead Revisited, comes to Brideshead for the first time, he is overwhelmed and attracted by the mansion’s beauty. It is only in time, as he interacts with the various people that inhabit the home that he comes to appreciate that living there carries with it an intellectual and moral demand. Brideshead — how like Paul’s Christ who is head of his bride the church — is symbolic of the mystical body of Jesus. Waugh seems to be teaching us that the optimal way to lure the nonbeliever into the communion of the church is through the attractive quality of Christianity’s beauty, trusting that, once captured by beauty, he will be led to truth and goodness as well.3 Thus, in the course of this presentation, I will attempt to show the compelling doctrine of co-inherence as it is displayed paradigmatically in the Incarnation of the Lord and then to demonstrate the implications of this teaching for Christian metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

The Distinction and the Connection

G. K. Chesterton said that even those who reject the doctrine of the Incarnation are different for having heard it.4 The claim that God became one of us changes the imagination, compelling a reassessment of both God and the world. This odd assertion is made, implicitly or explicitly, on practically every page of the New Testament. When, in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus says to the paralytic, “my son, your sins are forgiven,” the onlookers respond, “but only God can forgive sins,” thereby, despite themselves, stating the evangelical faith. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus says, “unless you love me more than your mother and father, indeed your very life, you cannot be my followers,” implying that he is the Good that must be loved above even the highest created goods. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus asserts, “heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away” — a claim which can consistently and sanely be made if and only if the speaker is himself the eternal Word. And that, of course, is precisely what the prologue to the Gospel of John explicitly affirms: “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God… and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (see Jn 1:1-14). John’s magnificent confession is echoed in the hymn that has found its way into Paul’s Letter to the Colossians: “in him [Christ] all things hold together; all were created for him and in him all things are maintained in being” (see Col 1:15-20). As this unprecedented and intellectually provocative assertion made its way across the centuries, it proved both illuminating and deeply disconcerting, as is evident from the boisterous debate that it inspired among Christians. How, many wondered, is God capable of such an act of condescension?

The classic doctrinal statement of the Church’s faith in the Incarnation is the formula hammered out at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Battling both Monophysitism and Nestorianism, the council fathers maintained that in Jesus two natures — human and divine — are grounded and instantiated in the person of the Logos, effecting thereby a hypostatic union of divinity and humanity. Though the natures are realized in the one person, they come together without “mixing, mingling, or confusion,” that is to say, without losing their ontological integrity and distinctiveness.

According to the logic of Chalcedon, it is decidedly not the case that God turns into a creature, ceasing to be God and transforming himself into a created nature; and it is assuredly not the case that a human being stops being human and turns into the Creator. Rather, divinity and humanity come together in the most intimate kind of union, yet non-competitively. But such non-competitiveness is possible only in the measure that God is not, himself, a creaturely or finite nature.5 Due to their metaphysical structure, finite things, despite the numerous ways in which they can find communion with one another, remain, at the most fundamental level, mutually exclusive, so that one can “become” another only through ontological surrender or aggression. Thus, a wildebeest
becomes a lion only by being devoured; a building turns into rubble and ash only by being destroyed; and you “become” me only through some act of enormous psychological manipulation.

Since, in the Incarnation, God becomes a creature without ceasing to be God or compromising the integrity of the creature that he becomes, God must be other than a creaturely nature. But the divine otherness is not simply the kind of otherness that obtains between two creatures, a standard over-and-againstness. Rather, God must be “otherly other,” to borrow Kathryn Tanner’s phrase. God is not one being among many, caught in the nexus of contingent relations, but rather, as David Burrell has argued, that which is responsible for the whole of finite reality, the one who, as Herbert McCabe has said, sustains the world the way a singer sustains a song. We are skating on the edge of a paradox, for it is this very transcendence to the world that allows God to effect an incomparable closeness to worldly things. Nicholas of Cusa expressed this by saying that God, even as he remains utterly other, is the non-aliened, and Augustine gestured toward the same metaphysical tension when he observed that God is, simultaneously, intimior intimo meo et superior summo meo. No theologian has more beautifully evoked the non-competitive transcendence of God than Irenaeus, who said: gloria Dei homo vivens, the glory of God is a human being fully alive, implying that God’s majesty is entirely compatible with creaturely flourishing.

The closeness of God to the world is also a function of God’s radical self-sufficiency. The otherly other Creator, who continually gives rise to all of finite reality, could not, even in principle, stand in a relationship of needness vis-à-vis what he makes in its entirety. As Whitehead quite rightly saw, a process view of God is incompatible with a theology of creation. When Anselm described God as “that than which no greater can be thought,” he signaled a break with the classical understanding of the divine, for the gods of ancient mythology and philosophy are superior beings to be sure, but they remain in the world alongside of other things. Therefore, they could not be characterized as “that than which no greater can be thought,” since they plus the world would be greater than they alone. Anselm’s peculiar description reflects precisely the non-contrastive and non-competitive transcendence that we have been describing, for it implies that God plus the world is not greater than God alone. The true God could not possibly need the world since nothing in creation could ever add to God’s perfection.

**Implications for Metaphysics**

This unique understanding of God, rooted in the paradox of the Incarnation, shapes the way Christians view the whole of existence. Precisely because God stands in no need of the world, all that exists apart from God is an expression and embodiment of sheerest love. Thomas Aquinas defines love as the willing of the good of the other as other. Since creatures are finite and imperfect, they remain, in regard to one another, to a certain degree in a relationship of need, and hence their capacity to will the good of the other will always be partially mitigated or compromised. But this cannot be true of the self-sufficient Creator. Therefore the very being of the universe is testament to the purest possible act of willing the good of the other as other. The First Vatican Council (1869–70), in its polemics against forms of Hegelianism that were creeping into Catholic thought in the nineteenth century, asserted that God did not make the world out of need but simply to manifest his glory. Whatever has come to be, therefore, has been loved into being. Love is not an accidental relationship that a creature may or may not enter into with God; instead, love—being from and for the other—is the relationship which constitutes any and all things from the beginning.

The ontological irreducibility of relationship appears as well when we look more closely at the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo. As Robert Louis Wilken has indicated, one of the major points of demarcation between the metaphysical account of the earliest Christians and that of the pagan philosophers was the teaching regarding the origins of the world.8 In most forms of classical philosophy, order comes into the universe through a divine shaping influence on some preexisting element. Thus, Aristotle’s first mover draws prime matter into shape through its irresistible attractiveness, and Plato’s demiourgos manipulates the primal chaos after consulting the patterns of the forms. But the Christians proposed something new—a doctrine of creation from nothing, according to which God brings the whole of finitude in all of its dimensions and aspects into being, without reference to a preexisting substrate. This implies in turn that there is nothing substantial and external with which God enters into relationship, but rather that all that is not God is, essentially, a relationship to God.

In his densely textured analysis of creation, Thomas Aquinas is compelled to twist and break the language of Aristotle in order to articulate
this radical teaching. In response to the question whether creation is something in the creature or perhaps between the creature and God, Thomas makes the Zen-like remark that that which receives the act of creation is itself a creature.9 Operating beyond the categories of substance and accident, Aquinas says that creation is quaedam relation ad creatorem cum novitate essendi (a kind of relation to the Creator with freshness of being).10 The creature does not have a relationship with God; instead, it is a relationship with God. This novelty and distinctiveness was well expressed in the poem God’s Grandeur by Gerard Manley Hopkins when he spoke of God as “the dearest freshness deep down things.”

John Milbank and his radical orthodoxy colleagues have helped us to see that this teaching implies, furthermore, the primordiality of non-violence. If creation is truly ex nihilo, then there is nothing about it that is invasive, interruptive, or interfering, for there is no antagonistic other upon which God works. Order does not occur through any type of intrusion or conquest; instead, God brings the world to be through an entirely gratuitous and nonviolent act of love.11 James Alison has suggested that the metaphysical doctrine of creation from nothing flows from the surprise of the Paschal Mystery, more precisely from the moment when the risen Jesus restores order to the frightened community of his disciples who had betrayed and abandoned him, not through answering violence, but through forgiveness.12 All of this shows that the world to the very roots of its being exists in God by means of a relationship, and that God can reach most intimately into things, as Aquinas puts it, “by essence, presence, and power.” The intertwining, the co-inherence, of God and the universe is a principal metaphysical consequence of the non-contrastive transcendence of God.

And from the co-inherence of God and creation follows the co-inherence of created things with one another. Because all finite reality—from archangels to quarks—comes forth here and now from the same divine generosity, the ontological ground of any one thing is identical to the ontological ground of any other. Like islands in an archipelago, we are all, despite our surface differences, connected at the depths. All creatures are ontological siblings. When he stood at the corner of Fourth and Walnut Streets in downtown Louisville in 1958, Thomas Merton realized this truth and in his Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander gave famous expression to the realization. Seeing all of the ordinary people bustling past him, it suddenly dawned on him that he loved them all, not in a sentimental or emotional sense, but mystically, even metaphysically. Waking from what he called “a dream of separateness,” he knew that they all belonged to God and hence to each other, connected through a point viérgte, a virginal point where each was being created by God.13 Understanding this co-inherence for the first time, Merton exclaimed: “there is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”14

It is precisely this connectedness of all creatures to one another through God which Thomas Aquinas articulates in his doctrine of analogy. Because all created beings participate in God who is ipsum esse subsistens, they are unavoidably related to one another by means of that shared participation. It has been central to the intellectual projects of Louis Dupré, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Alisdair Maclntyre, and many others to show how this metaphysical vision fell apart through the introduction of a univocal conception of being, which effectively placed God and creatures side by side under the general heading of existence and thereby separated them from one another. In a word, the univocal understanding of the concept of existence blinded us to the centrality and primordiality of co-inherence.

Implications for Epistemology

The non-competitive coming together of divinity and humanity in Jesus also has implications for the way we know. If, as the prologue to the Gospel of John insists, Jesus Christ is the visible icon of the Logos through which God has made all things, and if, as the Letter to the Colossians makes clear, Jesus is the one in whom and for whom all things exist and through whom they are maintained, then Jesus is the interpretive lens through which reality is properly read. Jesus Christ is, for Christians, epistemically basic, which is to say, that he functions as an epistemic trump: any account of reality which runs essentially counter to what is disclosed in the narratives about Jesus must be false. Lest this sound like sectarianism, we must bear in mind that both Augustine and Aquinas maintain that even “natural reason” is subject to Christ in the measure that the first principles and operations of the mind are nothing but a participation in the reasonability of the divine Logos, which became incarnate in Jesus. We Christians claim to know in a distinctive way, but
this does not exclude us from the general human conversation, quite the contrary. It allows us to enter it more honestly, effectively, and creatively.

So what does it mean more precisely to have the mind of Christ? First it means to hold to the radical intelligibility of being. If God has made all creation through the Logos, then all existence must be stamped with form, the mark of a knower. As many have pointed out, it is by no means accidental that the hard physical sciences emerged and came to flourish in a Christian culture, for only those who have a mystical confidence that being is intelligible will endeavor to know the world through observation, experimentation, and the forming of hypotheses. A universe without rational structure could never be the correlate to a scientific spirit. But that upon which all scientific activity rests cannot itself be the subject of scientific investigation; it must rather be the fruit of an intuition which can only be called religious in its depth, range, and breadth. Christians name it exactly as the faithful grasp of the doctrine of creation through the Word. This is the ground for the confident humanism that has characterized Christianity at its best over the centuries. We who hold precisely on theological grounds to the intelligibility of being have nothing to fear from the honest and careful practice of any and all intellectual disciplines, just the contrary. When Aquinas was challenged by certain of his contemporaries who were concerned that his use of Aristotle amounted to the diluting of the wine of revelation with the water of pagan science, Thomas responded, “No, it is rather the changing of water into wine.”

But Christians know, in light of Christ, how to specify more exactly the structure and content of the world’s intelligibility. Because all things are made through the Logos, which is itself nothing but a subsistent relation to the Father, co-inherence, and not substance or individuality, must be the basic truth of things. The wager of the Christian faith is that any philosopher, scientist, social theorist, or psychologist looking, within the confines of his own discipline, at the structure of reality will find something like being-for-and-with-the-other. Connection rather than separation, relationship rather than substance, will be disclosed as the most fundamental constitutive features of reality. In his writings on religion and science, physicist-priest John Polkinghorne has demonstrated that recent investigations of quantum physicists and chaos theorists reveal just this co-inherent quality at the most elemental level of matter, a finding, he suggests, that should not surprise Christians.

A further epistemological implication of the non-competitiveness of the natures in Christ is that the act of knowing is not so much individualist but inter-subjective. Over and against Descartes’s insistence that proper philosophy commences with the private ruminations of the isolated thinker, cut off from received tradition, sense experience, and assumption, Bernard Lonergan implied that it is not so much the cogito that matters as the cogitamus. Lonergan knew that Descartes’s program of radical doubt was a fantasy, a hopelessly unrealistic and self-defeating exercise, since the act of doubt itself is made possible only through a rich complex of language, supposition, and shared conviction. More to it, no philosopher or scientist would ever get her project off the ground had she not accepted a whole congeries of findings, data, principles, and assumptions that she herself had not verified directly. In a word, every responsible intellectual project involves, willy-nilly, a community of knowers seeking the truth together: the cogitamus rather than the cogito.

One of Lonergan’s intellectual heroes was John Henry Newman. In his Essay on the Development of Doctrine, Newman maintains that ideas exist, not on the printed page, but in the play of lively minds. The human intellect does not take in notions dully or passively, as though it were a tabula rasa; instead, it analyzes, judges, compares, assesses, and questions them. More to it, by a sort of inner compulsion, it seeks to deepen and intensify this process through the establishment of a conversation with other minds. In the playful, game-like exchange of insight, information, questions, and answers — beautifully exemplified in the dialogues of Plato and the treatises of Aquinas — ideas develop and human beings come to deeper understanding. This inter-subjective, communitarian manner of knowing is congruent with the metaphysics of co-inherence that we have been outlining. We know the complex truth of things precisely by wrapping our minds, Book of Kells-like, around one another.

A final epistemological consequence of an Incarnational sensibility is a thoroughly participative view of knowing. As we have seen, the intelligibility of being is a sign that all finite reality has been thought into existence, produced through the Logos of God. But this means that at the most fundamental level, there is a correspondence between knower and known, God’s knowledge, as it were, informing and actualizing what it knows. Karl Rahner reiterates this idea when he says, in Hearers of
the Word, that the meaning of existence is knowing and being known in an original unity.\textsuperscript{19} Now this primordial co-inherence of divine knower and creaturely intelligibility obtains analogically in all human acts of intellection. For Thomas Aquinas, the human subject comes to know precisely when his mind is illumined and stirred to act by an objective form, and that form is realized, illumined, stirred to act precisely in the act of being known.\textsuperscript{20} Knowing happens, in short, through a sort of mutual participation of knower and known, each one calling out to and perfecting the other. This mutuality is caught in the marvelous medieval dictum intellectus in actu est intelligibile in actu, the intellect in act is the actualization of the intelligible. It was this participative and mystical epistemology that was set aside in the modern period when the distan-
taxtion of subject from object, necessary for analysis, was emphasized. Descartes's concern with mastering nature through the mind is utterly alien to, say, Thomas Aquinas's desire to contemplate nature through intellectual participation. The former is made possible by a breakdown in the co-inherent Christian worldview that thoroughly informed the latter.

Implications for Ethics

When the young Gregory Thaumaturgos came to Origen to seek instruction in Christian doctrine, the great teacher told him that first he must share the life of the Christians and become their friend. Only in that way would he begin to understand what Christians teach.\textsuperscript{21} Origen shared the assumption of most sages in the ancient world that philosophy is not an academic discipline but a form of life, a bios. A disciple at Plato's academy was not so much a student of Platonic theory as a practitioner of a way of life centered on the pursuit of truth.\textsuperscript{22} This tight connection between knowledge and ethical practice was maintained by Christian thinkers throughout the patristic period and into the high Middle Ages. Augustine, Bernard, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Aquinas took for granted that real advancement in knowledge of Christian mysteries is a function of an accompanying advancement in the practice of the Christian virtues. If one were to pose to any of those figures the characteristically modern question about relating theology to ethics or spirituality, I trust he would not understand the question.

Nowhere is this connection between knowledge and practice clearer than in the Summa Theologicae of Aquinas. The great second part of the work, centered on the journey back to God, is predicated at every point upon the theological moves made in the first section, and the third part, dealing with Christ and the sacraments as the definitive way to God, is but a further specification and concretization of the second part. To speak, therefore, of Aquinas's "ethics" in abstraction from his doctrine of God or his Christology would be anomalous.\textsuperscript{23} All of this is an elaborate way of saying that, for the classical Christian tradition, the doctrine of the Incarnation and its accompanying metaphysics of co-inherence have clear implications in regard to ethics and that correct moral behavior itself conduces toward a deeper appreciation of a distinctively Christian ontology.

In order to appreciate the moral and behavioral consequences of a Christian worldview, I would like to look first at what followed ethically from a breakdown in that unified Weltanschauung. As I have already noted, in the late Middle Ages, figures such as Duns Scotus and William of Ockham put forward a univocal conception of being, replacing the analogical understanding found in Aquinas. The most telling ontological implication of this epistemological shift was the placing of God and the world under the same metaphysical umbrella, turning God thereby into a supreme being among beings. No longer the deepest ground of whatever exists, God necessarily appeared as a rival to the world which he confronted. When this supreme existent was viewed in relation to human beings, he was construed as a threat to freedom. One rubric under which modernity can be viewed is that of the struggle — sometimes explicit, more often implicit — to defend human liberty against the invasive authority of God.\textsuperscript{24} Thus the materialist Thomas Hobbes asserted that proper political order flows, not from a sense of the transcendent good, but rather from individual rights grounded in desire and fear. Though he softened this view to a degree, John Locke remained in a fundamentally Hobbesian framework, arguing that legitimate government exists to defend rights, defined as those things that one cannot help but desire. A consequence of this approach, perfectly in line with the nominalist assumptions that undergird it, is that citizens are seen as individuals jealously guarding their prerogatives over and against others who threaten them.

This strain of modernity came to even more radical expression in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For Feuerbach, Marx, and especially
Nietzsche, human flourishing is made possible only through the elimination of the competitive God. Feuerbach's formula is "the no to God is the yes to man"; Marx's dictum is that religion must be sloughed off like a snake's skin before human beings can aspire to maturity and political liberation; and Nietzsche bluntly declares that God is dead, because the Ubermensch in the sheerest exercise of his power has killed him. Jean-Paul Sartre elegantly states this conviction in terms of a compelling syllogism: "if God exists, I cannot be free; but I am free; therefore God does not exist." 25

Lest we think that these claims remain on the level of academic abstraction, consider the decision of the United States Supreme Court in the 1992 matter of Casey v. Planned Parenthood of Pennsylvania. In a breathtaking defense of human freedom over and against any power that might condition or direct it, the justices wrote: "at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, of the mystery of human life." 26 According to this formula, the true and the good are projections of human subjectivity, constructs of an arbitrary autonomy. What we see in all of this is the playing out of the shift to a univocal conception of being and a rivalrous view of the God-world relationship. The "no" to God is the "yes" to man only in the measure that God's existence stands over and against the world, impinging upon it intrusively and invasively.

However, when God is perceived, not as a competitive supreme being, but as the subsistent act of existence itself, then authentic human flourishing is appreciated as tantamount to a surrender to God and God's purposes. When God is correctly understood along Chalcedonian lines, then the co-inherence of humanity and divinity, of subjective freedom and objective truth, becomes evident. Over and against what they perceived to be the heteronomy inherent in the classical tradition, the Enlightenment philosophers advocated a bracing autonomy. Paul Tillich, reflecting the Augustinian-Christian spirit, characterized that dichotomy as simplistic and called instead for theonomy, the realization that one's deepest sense of freedom is coincident with an embrace of the God who is the ground of one's being. He knew, along with the great tradition, that the true God is not a threat to freedom, but the condition for the possibility of freedom properly exercised.

In the seventh century, the monothelite controversy raged within the Christian church. This was a dispute over the nature of will in Jesus Christ. Theologians of a more monophysite bent maintained that there was but one divine will in Jesus, but others held that a key implication of the two-natures doctrine of Chalcedon is that there must be two wills, divine and human, in the Lord. After much wrangling, the fathers of the Third Council of Constantinople in 681 determined that Christ possesses two wills and two natural operations, not opposed to one another, but cooperating in such a way that his human freedom finds itself precisely in surrender to his divine freedom. It might seem odd to rehearse the details of this ancient theological battle, but I believe that it sheds considerable light on the problematic that we have been exploring. In some ways, the monothelites — those who held to the unicity of will in Jesus — anticipated the philosophers of modernity, since they seemed to hold that divine authority and real human freedom are incompatible. In resolving the dispute as they did, the fathers of third Constantinople antecedently answered Hobbes, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Sartre: humanity is enhanced rather than diminished when placed in tight co-inherent relationship with the non-competitive God. Divine freedom and human freedom can interlace and overlap as thoroughly as any of the designs in the Book of Kells.

Again, the proper relationship between God and human freedom is on clear display in the second part of Aquinas's Summa Theologicae. Most of the moral philosophies and theologies of the late medieval and modern periods commence with a consideration of obligation. They are preoccupied with the limits set to freedom by the commands of God. What lies behind such a starting-point is the assumption that God and human beings are alien to one another and that divine and human freedoms are mutually antagonistic. But the moral section of the Summa does not commence with obligation, duty, or law, but rather with happiness. 27 Thomas wonders what makes human beings joyful and determines that neither power, nor riches, nor reputation, nor glory, nor any finite good could ever do so. It is, he concludes, only the infinite, inexhaustible good of God that could possibly satisfy the infinite longing of the human heart. Thus, like Augustine, he shows that there is a correspondence between human desire and divine desire, between human nature and divine nature. His moral theology is predicated, not on the struggle between an autonomous finite freedom and an arbitrary infinite freedom, but rather on the co-inherence between a human soul that finds its
beatitude in God alone and the God who delights in sharing his being with creation.

We must draw one further ethical implication from the non-competitiveness of God and the world. When asked why God creates, Thomas responds typically with the formula of the pseudo-Dionysius: *bonum diffusum sui*. The good God creates because it is his nature to give. And when asked why God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, Aquinas turns to the same formula. Because it is the nature of the good to give of itself and because God is the supreme good, it is only fitting that God should give himself utterly, superabundantly, and this explains the fittingness of the Incarnation. The being of God, in a word, is a being that gives. But this means that when a human being clings to God as her ultimate good, thereby finding happiness, she is conforming herself to this divine generosity. This is why, in a wide variety of his ethical writings, Karol Wojtyla, John Paul II, speaks of the centrality of the law of the gift in the Christian tradition: one's being increases and is enhanced in the measure that one gives it away. To achieve the ultimate end of the moral life is not to attain a prize that gratifies the ego; rather, it is to enter into the gracious way of being characteristic of God. One of the tragedies of our time, in my judgment, is that our presentation of the moral life remains conditioned by the assumptions and language of modernity — obligation, law, autonomy/heteronomy, divine demand — rather than by the much more traditional language of grace, co-inherence, and joy.

**Conclusion**

In our understanding of God, the universe, the act of knowing, and human ethical behavior, we Catholics are unique. Though we can discern family resemblances in the other great religions and even in the best features of the secular culture, the Catholic vision of things is distinctive. It is born of what Chesterton called the “jest” of the Incarnation, the utterly incongruous and unexpected juxtaposition of divinity and humanity. In this great co-inherence of Creator and creature, we spy the Pattern, the basic structure of reality; we touch and see, to borrow the language of St. John, what was from the beginning, the Word of life. Our task, as I see it, is the work taken up by every Christian generation: to narrate the story with joy and panache, to tell again and again the joke which is delightfully on us.

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**Chapter 6**

The Church’s Way of Speaking

ROBERT LOUIS WILKEN

"Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart." (Jer 15:16)

When St. Augustine abandoned the teaching of rhetoric in Milan to enroll for Baptism he asked Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, what he would recommend to read in the Scriptures “to make me reader and fitter to receive so great a grace.” Ambrose told him to read the prophet Isaiah. Augustine took his advice, but as soon as he took the book in hand he was perplexed by what he read. “I did not understand the first passage of the book,” he writes, and “thought the whole would be equally obscure.” So Augustine laid it aside, as he explains, “to be resumed when I had more practice in the Lord’s style of language.” In dominico eloquio! An arresting and beguiling phrase!

For the Christian reader Isaiah is a demanding and difficult book once one strays beyond the familiar passages cited in the New Testament or read in Christian worship, Isaiah 9 at Christmas, Isaiah 53 during Holy Week. To the uninitiated the first chapter is particularly daunting with its arcane oracles against Judah and Jerusalem: “Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly. They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel” (Is 1:4–5). For someone like Augustine, formed by the poetry of Virgil and the philosophy of Plotinus, the opening verses must have seemed embarrassingly parochial, taken up as they are with the fortunes of the ancient Israelites centuries earlier. Words such as “sinful nation,” “holy one of Israel,” “daughter of Zion,” “new moon and sabbath” would have sounded alien to his ears, and anthropomorphisms like “I will vent