

# That Man Might Become God

## Lectures on Christian Theology

Second Edition



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“Discussion of theology is not for everyone. Nor is it for every occasion or every audience. Neither are all its aspects open to inquiry. It is not for all people, but only for those who have been tested and have found a sure footing in study and who, more importantly, have undergone, or are at least undergoing, purification of both body and soul. What is the right time? Whenever we are free from the mire and noise outside and our mind is not confused by illusory, wandering images. Who should listen to discussions of theology? Those for whom it is a serious undertaking, not just another subject. What aspects of theology should be investigated and up to what limit? Only those within our grasp, and only to the limit of the experience and capacity of our audience. I am not maintaining that we ought not to be mindful of God at all times. It is more important that we should remember God than that we should breathe. In fact we should do nothing else. It is not continual remembrance of God I seek to discourage, but continual discussion entered upon merely as an end in itself.”

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus

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## Lecture 1: Revelation and Tradition

Welcome again to Religious Studies 332, “Christian Theology”. Most of you who are reading these words will have already attended the first class, and you’ll have heard my introductory comments.

For those who may have just added this course and who weren’t present the first day, you should be aware that our studies this semester are going to be guided by a specific understanding of Christianity. As I pointed out in the opening session, the adjective “Christian” can be used in a wide variety of ways, some of them uselessly vague. Over the centuries all sorts of different people, with very different—often contradictory—perspectives, have called themselves Christians. Clearly, we need to limit or narrow the meaning of the word if we’re to have any hope of staying focused and coming to any significant grasp of this religious tradition. For our purposes in this class, it seems to me best to confine our attention to what the majority of Christians have held and continue to hold in common, and with this in mind, I plan to limit our discussions to those forms of Christianity which, at a minimum, include as their distinguishing marks two fundamental beliefs and two fundamental rites or practices:

1. Belief in the *Trinity*: a belief, in other words, that there is only one God, but that this God exists as three distinct Persons who share the same Divine essence.
2. Belief in the *Incarnation*: a belief, in other words, that the eternal “second Person” of that Trinity, the Son of God, became man as Jesus Christ.
3. Practice of *Baptism*, with water and “in the Name of the Trinity”: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19).
4. Practice of *Holy Communion*—also called the “Lord’s Supper” or the “Eucharist”—according to the specific directions and example of Christ (see 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

As I told you in class, this “definition” of Christianity is broad enough to include all three of the major historical forms of the faith—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant. But at the same time it excludes certain other religious groups which, though they may use the name “Christian”, either do not accept both of these basic beliefs or do

not practice both of these rites. Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, and Mormons are among the groups excluded by the definition. I stressed before, and I stress again now, that by excluding these groups from our discussions I don't mean to judge anyone. I'm not attempting to evaluate the spiritual health or final destiny of those who are members of these and other such sectarian movements. The point is simply to keep our topic manageable by focusing on the Christian "mainstream".

As one final point of review from the opening session, I should remind you that I'm going to be accentuating the standpoint of Orthodoxy throughout much of the term. I do this for several reasons. First, Orthodoxy is widely acknowledged by Christian scholars—regardless of their own personal commitments and preferences—to have preserved the ancient forms of the faith more fully than have either Catholics or Protestants. It can therefore tell us a great deal about the theology of the early Church, at a time when the teachings of Christ and His apostles were still fresh in people's memories. Second, Orthodoxy happens to be my own tradition, and it's therefore the form of Christianity that I know best, both professionally and experientially, and about which I can speak with the greatest authority. On the other hand—and here we come to a third, and perhaps most important, reason for my focus—Orthodoxy is the form of Christianity that most people in the American South know the *least* about. It only makes sense that a university-level course in religion should help to give students new information and a fresh perspective. As I said in the opening class, there's little point in my simply repeating things that Christians in the class are already familiar with from their own churches or Sunday schools.

What I want to do in the remainder of this lecture, having reminded you how we'll be using the word "Christian", is to clarify the rest of the title of the course, and that means explaining what "theology" is and what, specifically, you should expect from a course in *systematic* theology. I very lightly touched on these topics in our opening session, but some refinement is in order.

Every religion is a combination of theory and practice, of doctrine and method. Theory or doctrine is concerned with the nature of ultimate Reality and with the way in which all other realities are related to It. Practice or method is concerned with the means and supports that are necessary for human beings to become united with that Reality—to

partake of Its nature so as to become real themselves. In the case of Christianity, the Ultimate is referred to as “God”, and the study of that God, of His relationship with lesser realities, and of the means by which man may become united with Him, is called “theology”—from *theos*, which is the Greek word for “God”. Theology may thus be defined as the science of God and of deification (see 2 Pet. 1:4).

The aim of this course is to introduce you to a specific kind of Christian theology, namely, *systematic* theology, which is a mode of theological science that investigates and describes the interrelationships among the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion. As I say in the syllabus, the theologian is interested in the “internal consistency and underlying meaning of the Christian view of Reality”. It’s the task of systematics to underscore this consistency by showing how beliefs about God, man, the fall, Jesus Christ, and life after death are all organically *interconnected*. It might be helpful, before going any further, to say just a word or two about some other kinds of theology so that you can better understand by contrast what we’re going to be engaged in this term.

It’s customary to distinguish at least four different modes of theological study: *systematic* theology, *philosophical* theology, *moral* theology, and *ascetical* theology. Systematic theology is concerned mainly with the *exposition* of doctrine, with explaining the essential meaning of the basic truths of a given religion. Philosophical theology—also sometimes called apologetic theology, or simply apologetics—is concerned with the rational *defense* of those truths. Here is where one encounters proofs for the existence of God and other logical arguments in support of the objects of faith, such as those I explore in my course “Faith, Doubt, and God” (Religious Studies 412). Moral theology has yet another role to play; its main task consists in the *application* of Christian truths to the ethical dilemmas of life: Is abortion ever justified? Can there be a just war? Is capital punishment morally right? These are the sorts of questions moral theology attempts to answer. Finally, there is ascetical theology, a branch of theological science concerned with the *verification* of doctrine. It’s one thing to have the basic beliefs of the Christian religion defended rationally or logically, as the philosophical theologian endeavors to do, but it’s something else to be led to a point where you can experience the truth of those beliefs for yourself. Such experience is precisely the aim of ascetical theology: to provide us with a spiritual method for so transforming our minds and hearts that we can see God

and His truths directly (see Rom. 12:2). In any case, to repeat: our focus in this class is *systematic* theology—though we shall touch briefly on some ascetical issues near the end of the term—and our main interest therefore will be the exposition and explanation of doctrine as we exam the Christian Map of Reality.

Now the minute one says this, an obvious problem arises. When we set about reading a map, we assume (or at least we *hope*) that the person who made it knew what he was doing and that his marks were based on some genuine discovery; for in order to make an accurate map, one must first know the actual lay of the landscape. A cartographer must be an explorer as well, someone who has actually journeyed through the regions his map describes. Here is where the problem comes in, for in the present case—in the case of theology—we’re talking about a landscape that includes nothing less than Ultimate Reality, and it’s only natural to wonder what cartographer could ever possibly know such a thing. Who (you may ask) could be so wise, or so presumptuous, as to tell the rest of us in what direction this Reality lies and what its boundaries and major features are? And who is to say, therefore, whether the Christian map is a good one and therefore worthy of study? To make the same point in less metaphorical, more prosaic terms: how are we ever to justify or validate Christian claims about God and salvation?

If this were a course in philosophical theology, we would begin answering such questions by attempting first to address the most radical of them all, the question of whether there’s a God or not, and our validation would require that we use some of the classical arguments for the existence of an Ultimate Reality. For obviously no religious claims (whether Christian or otherwise) are worth very much if there’s actually no God—no Supreme Being—and with this fact in mind, we would endeavor to demonstrate the logic of believing in God’s existence. The skeptic would be asked to consider cosmological, teleological, moral, ontological, and other classic proofs, all of which are intended to lead the mind logically from things it presently knows about the familiar world of space, time, and matter, and about itself, to that First Principle or Ultimate Source upon which both that knowledge and that world depend.

This, however, is a course in systematic theology, and the teacher of systematics begins at a point further down the road. He begins his investigations (as we shall this semester) having already accepted the existence of God. This acceptance may be based

upon any one of four things. You can undertake the study of systematic theology as the result of a prior *logical demonstration* in which the Reality of God has already been established by argument; or you may do so on the basis of an act of *faith*, which accepts as true the teachings of some trusted authority (this is where most Christians start); or you may do so in response to a *religious experience*, in which Ultimate Reality is directly perceived or disclosed; or yet again, if none of these conditions apply, serious and open-minded students of systematics may simply concede the existence of God *for the sake of the argument* and undertake their explorations on that tentative or experimental basis alone.

Whatever one's own personal entry point, systematic theology sets out from this basic assumption, this acceptance of God, in order then to answer all other theological questions—questions about creation, the fall, the incarnation, the means of salvation, and so forth. Everything is to be traced back to its roots in God, and all questions are answered and all problems solved on the basis of one very simple, but very potent, idea: the idea of Divine *Revelation*. How can anyone possibly know the truth of all the issues we'll consider this term? We can know the truth, the Christian replies, because God has revealed it. We come to know *about* God *through* God, that is, through His own deliberate self-expression or manifestation to man. Man may come to see what is true because God has seen to it. God is thus a given in systematic theology, and *given* that given, everything else follows from that God's self-disclosure.

Now theologians make a distinction between two modes or kinds of Revelation: general or natural and special or supernatural. The former, *general* Revelation, has to do with the way in which God has made Himself known in a general or generic way to all people through the medium of nature, and this includes both external nature or the world around us (see the classic expression of this in Rom. 1:20), on the one hand, and internal nature, which is our own deepest self (see Rom. 2:15), on the other. *Special* Revelation refers by contrast to God's manifestation of Himself to particular or special individuals or groups, often in ways attended by miraculous or supernatural phenomena: for example, to Moses on Mt Sinai (Exod. 3:1-14), to St Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-18), and to St John on the Island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9-20). To connect these two modes of Revelation with two of the four forms of theology, I might point out that it's upon the

first kind of Revelation (general or natural) that the philosophical theologian bases his *defense* of doctrine, whereas it's upon the second kind (special or supernatural) that the systematic theologian bases his *exposition* of doctrine.

I just called your attention to several Biblical examples of special Revelation, and of course many more could be mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. On the other hand, despite what some of you may have been led to believe, the Bible itself is *not* such an example, not in itself or as such a Divine self-disclosure. Now please don't misunderstand me here: from the traditional Christian point of view, the Scriptures are certainly to be understood as divinely *inspired*, as having been written (in other words) under the guidance of God and for the sake of conveying Himself and His will to mankind. I'll be saying more about this in my next lecture. But the Bible is not itself directly revealed. This is a very important distinction—the distinction, that is, between *inspiration* and *revelation*—and it's worth emphasizing since much that we'll be discussing throughout the semester will be based on this crucial difference. It's a distinction, too, that helps to differentiate Christianity from certain other religions—religions in which the self-disclosure of God *does* take the written form of a revealed holy book. For example, the primary revelation of God to the Jews is the *Torah* (or Law), a law that is verbally embodied in the written texts of the Pentateuch, the first five books of what Christians call the Old Testament, texts which (according to Orthodox Judaism) were revealed directly to Moses. Similarly, the primary revelation of God in Islam is also a written text: namely, the Qur'an, which was revealed word-for-word (Muslims believe) to the Prophet Muhammad. And in Hinduism, too, the basis of all true or orthodox doctrine is said to be a collection of sacred texts called the Vedas, revealed *verbatim* to ancient seers known as *rishis*.

The spiritual economy of Christianity is very different, however. In Christianity, God's revelation of Himself takes the primary form, not of a book, but a *person*—the Person of Jesus Christ—a person to whom this religion's scriptures point and from whom the truth of any particular Christian doctrine is ultimately derived. This is something the Bible itself affirms. I'm thinking, for example, of such texts as Colossians 1:15, which describes Jesus as “the image of the invisible God”, or again John 14:9, where Jesus Himself says, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father”. I realize that some of you may

be troubled by these observations. Be assured: my aim in making this distinction between revealed books, on the one hand, and personal revelation, on the other, is in no way meant to belittle the Bible or reduce its importance for Christians. Nevertheless, however important it is—as I said a moment ago, I’ll be talking more precisely about its importance and function in my next lecture—one must at the same time insist that the Bible is by no means the *primary* or *essential* foundation of the Christian faith.

This is very clear historically speaking, though Christians who know nothing about the early Church are often confused on this point. It’s clear, in other words, that the Christian religion existed before the initial composition, and long before the full acceptance, of the New Testament scriptures as we know them today, and obviously no B can be essential to the existence of some A when B followed A in the temporal sequence. My son’s existence is not essential to my existence, though of course mine was to his. As you may know, the writing, the circulation or distribution, and the final canonization (or official authorization) of the Christian scriptures took place over a period of more than three centuries, beginning in roughly 50 A.D. with the earliest writings of St Paul and culminating in the late 300s, when the New Testament as we know it today was officially agreed upon by the Church as a whole. During this rather lengthy period, however, Christianity was very much alive and well. Apostles were busily evangelizing large parts of the world (traveling as far as England and India), people were being baptized and receiving the Eucharist and other sacraments, creeds were being written and promulgated, and holy men and women, the saints, were being martyred and honored.

The Bible was not the cause or reason for all this early saving activity, however, for it didn’t yet exist in its full form at that point, and this fact should tell us something, even today, about the proper place of the Scriptures in the Christian life. It should help us realize that the fundamental importance of the Holy Scriptures is the fact that they serve as an inspired commentary on and reminder of Jesus Christ, who Himself is the primary Revelation of God, and who Himself is the source from whom all true doctrine and practice flow. The Bible is not the basis of the Christian faith; the Son of God is.

Here’s another point that needs stressing before we go any further: the Bible in its role as a pointer to Christ actually forms but one part or one strand of a larger and much more encompassing witness or testimony. This larger and more comprehensive reminder

is what a theologian calls “tradition”. *Tradition* is going to be a very important idea for us throughout the semester, and it’s therefore worth pausing to consider it carefully. By “tradition”—please note this well—I don’t mean simply custom, or habit, or nostalgia for the past, though of course we often do use the word in these senses, simply as a synonym for old-fashioned or long-established. When employed in a theological context, however, the word has a much more precise, and and more dynamic, meaning. It’s etymologically derived from the Latin term *traditio*, which is a translation of the Greek word *paradosis*. Both terms refer to the “passing along” or “handing over” of something that has been received from a prior source—just as a runner in a relay race might pass along a baton to a teammate. Note that it’s not simply the object passed along—in my analogy, the baton—that constitutes tradition, but the actual *act* of passing it, with all the movement and energy—and even perspiration!—that goes into a race.

As the word is used in theology, it’s not however just any transmission or movement that one has in mind, but rather the passing along of something that originated in and with God Himself. In order for something to be “traditional” it must be rooted in an act of God—or more exactly, for Christians, in the saving *acts* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We can see this usage of the term in the New Testament letters of St Paul: “I have received from the Lord that which also I *delivered* unto you” (1 Cor. 11:23), he writes, and the Greek term translated into English as “delivered” is the verb *paredōka*, which is cognate with the noun *paradosis*. A perfectly acceptable translation would therefore be to say that Paul “traditioned” what he received from God to his hearers. With the same idea and using the same Greek word he writes elsewhere, “I delivered [*paredōka*] unto you first of all that which I also received [from Christ]” (1 Cor. 15:3).

We could define the Christian Tradition, therefore, as the *transmission of something that is first given or disclosed by God in Jesus Christ*. Tradition is thus like the continuing echo or reverberation of direct Revelation, that Revelation “who” (not which) is God’s Son: tradition is the effect, and Revelation the cause. Revelation, you could say, is the projection of God into space, and Tradition is the extension of that Revelation through time. An image might be useful. Imagine a stone being dropped into a pool of water, and picture the way the ripples radiate from its point of impact to the shore of the pool. Just so, God “drops” Himself into our world, and beginning with His “impact” on

that first Christmas in Bethlehem, the waves of Tradition began to spread all the way down the ages until our own day.

Understanding these key terms in this way, we could say furthermore that anything that serves to make known the truth that God revealed in the Person of Christ, anything by means of which the explosive energy of that original Revelation has been prolonged or extended or carried forward through the ages, is by definition an essential part of Tradition. Obviously the Bible plays a uniquely important role in this process—Christians from South Carolina usually don't need convincing of that!—but the Bible is *not* alone in this role. Tradition includes other writings as well, such as creeds or statements of faith and the proclamations of the early Church Councils, as well as the written works of great saints and those we call the church “fathers”. Tradition also takes non-written or non-verbal forms, embracing such things as the gestures, ritual movements, and music of liturgical worship, as well as the material elements or physical substances that are used in the proper performance of sacred rites (like water, bread, wine, and oil). It also includes the oral instructions of advanced spiritual elders, and—perhaps most elusively and mysteriously of all—Tradition can be discerned, implicitly, in the beatific and transformative energies that are sometimes present icons or in the tombs and relics of saints. All this, and much more, comes broadly under the heading of Christian *Tradition*.

Now I'm sure that this way of looking at things, which is shared in all its essentials by Roman Catholics, traditional Anglicans, and Orthodox Christians, will seem very strange, if not in fact dangerously wrong, to many of you from Protestant backgrounds. This is because Protestantism, ever since the Reformation in the sixteenth century, has tended to confine its attention to the Scriptures alone and thus to the strictly Biblical dimension of Tradition. In fact, Protestants often view the Bible and Tradition as two different, and perhaps even contradictory, things, and they sometimes worry that if one gives too great a value to the extra-Biblical sources I've mentioned, authentically *Divine* Revelation will be eclipsed or obscured by merely *human* invention. This Protestant concern is quite understandable, and its warning is very apt, for it's obviously true that the *unwritten* dimensions of Tradition—the liturgical, symbolical, sacramental, and oral strands—are more susceptible to distortion, misinterpretation, and manipulation

than the written, though (and I stress this) no one should be so naïve as to think that the Bible is somehow immune to distorted interpretations and abuse. On the other hand, it's impossible to ignore the historical point I made just a few moments ago, namely, that Christianity was already vibrantly alive and well long before there existed a Bible as we know it today. It follows, therefore, that the Holy Scriptures cannot and should not be the Christian's sole connection with God, for they emerged within the context of a prior, already existing, and all-embracing Tradition. In fact, the Scriptures themselves admit the existence of a larger, unwritten Tradition. To mention just one quick example, I might quote again from the words of St Paul: "Brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions [*paradoseis*] which you have been taught, *whether by word or our epistle*" (2 Thess. 2:15). What the apostle is saying is that certain teachings have come to these "brethren" in a written form, that is, in other letters or "epistles" that St Paul (or perhaps someone else) had sent them earlier, whereas other teachings were transmitted to them strictly "by word" of mouth.

Given this and other similar formulations, it's clear that the systematic theologian, or anyone else (for that matter) who is trying to gain a thorough understanding of the Christian religion, must come to terms with Tradition in both its written and its unwritten forms. Both will therefore be used in our studies this term. The written dimension, especially the Bible, will be kept very firmly in mind as a touchstone or standard, as an objective guarantor, of the original Revelation in Christ. But the *unwritten* must be considered as well in order to underscore the continuing life of that Revelation and in order to prevent the "letter from killing the spirit". In case you're not familiar with that line, it comes from yet another passage in the writings of Paul: "Our sufficiency is from God," he writes, "who has made us ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for *the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*" (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

Perhaps in light of these distinctions and definitions what Kallistos Ware tells us in the Prologue to our book will make better sense to you: "Tradition means not primarily the acceptance of formulae or customs from past generations, but rather the ever-new, personal, and direct experience of the Holy Spirit *in the present*, here and now" (8). Think about that sentence; it's full of implications, and we'll wish to keep it in mind throughout the next several lectures.

## Lecture 2:

### A Traditionalist Perspective on the Bible

In my last lecture, I spent some time talking about the nature and aims of theology, the “science of God and deification”, and I contrasted the kind of theology we’ll be studying, systematic theology, with three other types: philosophical theology, moral theology, and ascetical theology. I then raised the question as to how exactly a theologian goes about trying to validate his Map of Reality. Philosophical theologians, I said, attempt to provide such validation by first of all proving the existence of God. Their task is one of defense, and they begin by defending the most fundamental of religious claims, the claim that there is an Ultimate or Supreme Reality. In contrast, systematic theology, where the task is the exposition or explanation of doctrine, simply accepts the existence of God as its starting-point and then goes on to base every other claim it makes on the data of Divine Revelation.

This observation led me to distinguish between two major kinds of Revelation: general or natural, on the one hand, and special or supernatural, on the other. I told you that systematic theology is based mainly on the latter, but I also said that it’s very important to be clear as to what precisely this special revelation consists in. Unlike certain other religions, such as Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, the foundation of Christianity is not a book or set of books but a person, and it’s to that person, Jesus Christ, that Christians look for the primary Revelation of God. All other sources of authority, including the Bible, are derivative from Him, all of them forming different strands or streams in the overall “flow” of what I labeled Tradition. Revelation may be pictured as a vertical descent of God into space in the incarnation of Jesus, while Tradition (both written and unwritten) may be understood as the horizontal radiation of that Revelation through time. Tradition in this deeper and more ample sense—in all its fullness and richness—includes such things as creeds, icons, liturgical symbols, and traditional prayers and other sacred formulae, which from time to time we’ll have occasion to examine in some detail. My assumption throughout the course will be that *all* of these sources are meant to work in concert with the written texts of the Bible—*all* of them serving to recall the Christian “backward” to Christ while at the same time

projecting “forward” through history, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the saving energies that were released by His life on earth.

We need to be careful, however, in using these words *backward* and *forward*. In stressing that Christ is God’s original and primary Revelation for Christians, I may have made it sound as though temporal proximity to the historical Jesus were the only consideration, and that the Tradition grows more trustworthy or authentic the further back we go in time. But actually the truth is considerably subtler. As it turns out, the theologian must take account of two different but complementary factors: one of *discontinuity*, represented (if you will) by concentric circles surrounding a common center—some of the circles being closer to that center than others—and another of *continuity*, represented by geometrical radii, which extend outward from the center, piercing the circles and prolonging or projecting the center toward the furthest circumference. On the one hand, Jesus of Nazareth, whom Christians believe to be God incarnate, lived on this earth at a particular point in time (roughly 4 B.C. to 29 A.D.), and with each passing year we’re carried further and further away from that temporal moment, further from the “center”; this of course results in what I’m calling *discontinuity*, with some “circles” (or ages) being closer to the source than others. On the other hand, Jesus Himself said, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20), and He told his followers that he would send them the Holy Spirit as their continuing guide, who (He said) “will lead you into all truth” (John 16:13); hence, there must also be *continuity*, represented by the “radii”.

What this means is that at any particular moment of Christian history, two distinct forces will always be acting: one centrifugal and one centripetal; and theology must consider them both. It’s the first force that required the closing of the canon. The early Church agreed that the Scriptures should not be added to indefinitely—that temporal proximity to the earthly life of Jesus should be the criterion for the fullest or most complete inspiration, though here it’s worth noting that the person responsible for most of the New Testament books, St Paul, was not among the original disciples. He himself was one step removed from the primary Revelation, and this was a matter of considerable concern to those, like St Peter, who had actually walked and worked with Jesus and who at first contested the legitimacy of Paul’s apostleship. On the other hand, it’s the second

or “centripetal” force that accounts for the Christian’s continued connection to Christ down through the centuries and for the possibility of a continuing exposition of truth. Just a glance at some of the early Christian creeds or statements of faith and at the writings of the Church fathers will amply demonstrate the fact that, as time wore on, Christians came to a clearer and clearer and more and more explicit understanding of the significance of Christ in their lives, and this would not have happened had they not still been in touch with the “center”, or—rather—had the power of that center not continued to expand outward from its original point of impact in time. As St Leo the Great (c. 400-461) wrote, “Everything that the Son of God did and taught for the reconciliation of the world, we not only know as a historical account of things now past, but we also experience in the power of the works that are present” (Sermon 63). And the expansion didn’t stop in the fifth century. A twentieth-century saint, Nikolai Velimirovich (1881-1956), can still say, “Our religion is founded on spiritual experience, which is seen and heard just as surely as any physical fact in this world—not theory, not philosophy, not human emotions, but experience.”

I hope to make the relationship between these two forces clearer to you as the semester unfolds. But to get just a taste of what I’m talking about, take a look at the various statements of faith on pp. 219-24 in the Reader, and note the increasing clarity and specificity of belief as one moves from the Apostles’ Creed to the Definition of Chalcedon. What we find is that Christians became better and better able to articulate the fullness of their faith as time passed, even though they were getting further and further away from the historical object of that faith. This would not have been possible were the two forces not both operating. (We’ll examine these early creeds much more fully later on in the course.)

In any case, to sum up these opening thoughts: we need to realize that both written and unwritten elements, and both centripetal and centrifugal forces, are always at work in the Christian Tradition (the same is true for every authentic religion), and we need to allow for their free interplay. The oral and other extra-Scriptural elements of Christianity must be permitted to help in explicating the *implicit* contents of the Bible, for only in this way are the Scriptures able to speak in response to the questions and problems of subsequent ages, and only thus, in tandem, can both of these complementary

forces guarantee the continuing impact of Revelation. It's true, of course, that no water is as fresh as spring water, and it would therefore doubtless be best if we contemporary theologians could simply drink directly from the original source—best (in other words) if we could return to the beginning and live among the first apostles, physically present with Christ Himself. For the moment, however, until that possibility is fully realized in our own sanctified or deified experience, the desert of time (to continue using this metaphor) has made aqueducts and irrigation systems necessary, in order that the nourishing refreshment of Revelation might persist. This refreshment is what the “aqueducts” of Tradition provide.

I've talked about the Christian Tradition and hinted as to where the Bible fits in. I'd like to continue in this lecture, as further background to our studies this term, with some additional comments on the specific issue of the Bible's authority. I've quoted more than once from the Scriptures already, and I'll continue to do so throughout the semester. But what's the point? someone might ask. What's the value or significance of these quotations? Why are we acting as though certain lines from St Paul or the Gospels are so important? Why not refer instead to some other classic work of true wisdom, like Plato's *Republic*, Ibn Arabi's *Meccan Openings*, or the *Bhagavad Gita*, to mention only three of the world's most important treasures? What is it about this particular book, the Holy Bible, which makes it worth quoting and trusting? As perhaps you know, different Christians have gone about answering these questions in different ways, and it's therefore important that I try to give you at least some sense of the particular understanding of Biblical truth upon which our own use of the Scriptures in this class will rely.

The first thing that needs pointing out is that the Bible, like the sacred scriptures of every religion, claims for itself a Divine mandate or authority. There are two especially important New Testament passages in this connection. The first is to be found in 2 Tim. 3:16, which runs as follows: “*All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*” The second comes in 2 Pet. 1:20-21, where we read: “*You must understand that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*” To be inspired means literally to be “breathed into”. As you can see from the very form of the noun “in-spira-tion”, this

“breath” is intimately linked with the idea of spirit. In fact, the Greek word *pneuma* and the Latin word *spiritus*, both of which are translated into English as “spirit”, can also mean “breath” or “wind”, while their verbal cognates signify not only the “breathing” involved in respiration but also the “blowing” of the wind. (Take a look at John 3:8, which is part of a conversation between Christ and the Pharisee Nicodemus, for an example of these different levels of meaning.) Given these linguistic considerations, it’s clear that the two passages I just quoted are actually saying much the same thing, though in somewhat different ways. The verses in 2 Peter mean essentially the same thing as the verse in 2 Timothy: namely, that a man is “inspired” precisely to the extent that he’s either “moved” or “blown upon” by God’s Holy Spirit.

But now the question becomes: just what does it mean to be “moved” or “blown upon” by God? For reasons I shall clarify later on in the course—when we focus in Chapter 5 of Ware’s book on Christian teaching about the Holy Spirit itself—most theologians have said, and would say today, that whatever this movement involves, it’s not a matter of being compelled or coerced. With a few exceptions (notably, the Reformer John Calvin [1509-64] and his followers), the majority of Christian authorities down the centuries have insisted that the operations of God upon—and in—a human being are such as to persuade and attract, and that God does not exert the pressure of an irresistible determination or force. In other words God’s action is never such as to leave human beings without freedom to choose. I don’t wish to defend this claim right now, but simply to show you how it applies to the issue at hand, the issue of inspiration. Being inspired (I’ve said) means being moved by God, but being moved by God—if the majority of Christians have been right—means being attracted, not forced; encouraged, not compelled. Therefore, whatever it is and however it works, the Divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures is to be understood in a way that leaves the human authors of the Bible at least in some measure free: free in selecting their own human words, and free in choosing the fundamental forms and images and literary genres through which to convey the message that God had inspired them to make known to the world.

Now I realize many of you will have come to this course with a very different understanding of what Biblical inspiration entails. For various reasons, historical and otherwise, Christianity in our part of the country often goes hand in hand with a view of

the Scriptures that prefers to downplay the freedom of their human authors, or even to ascribe their authorship solely to God, in order to emphasize the complete and total reliability or trustworthiness of the text. The Bible is often said to be the very Word of God Himself, and is frequently treated as if its contents were simply another name for *the Truth*. This point of view is sometimes called inerrantism since it teaches that the Scriptures are without any errors or flaws: each book, each chapter, each verse, each word is exactly what God wished it to be since He Himself wrote the Bible by using men as His instruments. Sometimes the idea of verbal dictation goes along with this viewpoint, and the Biblical writers are regarded as having acted in the role of amanuenses, copying down exactly—perhaps even “automatically”—what was dictated to them by the Holy Spirit. This in fact *is* the Orthodox Jewish understanding of the *Torah*. It’s also the Muslim view of the Qur’an, which Muslims believe to have been revealed word-for-word to the Prophet Muhammad; for this reason, Islam teaches that the Qur’an is verbally perfect and without any error. Such an inerrantist conception is not, however, the understanding of the Christian Scriptures that has prevailed throughout most of Christian history, nor in fact does it appear to be the Bible’s own view of itself. Modern and contemporary inerrantist views of Scripture (often associated with “fundamentalism”) are the historical exception to the Christian rule.

Most Christian theologians, from the earliest times, have taken instead the same approach C. S. Lewis does in the chapter on “Scripture” in the course Reader: namely, that while the Bible is certainly *true* in essentials, it’s not itself to be equated with *Truth*. This point of view doesn’t really have a technical name, but as a kind of shorthand for purposes of discussion, I’ll call it “traditionalism”. According to traditionalists like Lewis, it’s foolish to ignore the fact—for Lewis the *indisputable* fact—that the Scriptures contain a great deal that is purely human in origin. “The human qualities of the raw material show through,” Lewis writes. “Naivety, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not ‘the Word of God’ in the sense that every passage, in itself, gives impeccable science or history.” Rather, says Lewis, “it *carries* [my italics] the Word of God; and we (under grace, *with attention to tradition* [again my emphasis] and to interpreters wiser than ourselves, and with the use of such intelligence and learning as we may have) receive that word from it not by using

it as an encyclopedia or an encyclical, but by steeping ourselves in its tone or temper and so learning its over-all message” (20-21).

I want to underline Lewis’s point that the Bible is not itself *the* Word of God. On the contrary, the “Word” is a title traditionally, and more appropriately, reserved for the eternal Son of God and second Person of the Holy Trinity, whom the Gospel of John calls the *Logos* (the Greek word for “Word”; see John 1:1) and about whom, of course, we’ll be saying much more later on. In Lewis’s opinion, it’s more accurate if we say instead that the Bible “carries” or *contains* the Word of God. Thus understood, Scripture’s human and temporal words can be seen as transmitting and perpetuating the Revelation of the Divine and eternal Word in Jesus Christ. According to those who share Lewis’s position on this point, the men who wrote the Christian scriptures, *unlike* Moses (for Orthodox Jews) or the Prophet Muhammad (for Muslims), were *not* simply passive instruments playing the role of stenographers. They were instead active agents in the propagation of what they’d personally witnessed, or else what they’d been told by others who themselves were eyewitnesses. One thinks in this connection of the opening lines of the Gospel of Luke: “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered [here again is that word “traditioned” in the Greek] to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you might know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed” (Luke 1:1-4). Passages like this suggest that in reading the Scriptures we’re dealing with a collection of texts which, whatever the degree of “Divine pressure” (Lewis’s phrase) upon them, were at the same time the work of human beings—a human being, in the case of St Luke, who admits that he’s read other books on the subject, who has also seen and heard things himself, and who deliberately sets out on that basis to tell his reader what he clearly acknowledges is his own *version* (his own “account”) of what happened.

This, of course, is only one passage, from only one Biblical book. Perhaps you’re wondering, beyond this isolated example, what other reasons there might be for adopting Lewis’s standpoint. If you were to ask him—or, for that matter, St Athanasius or St

Augustine or some other early Church Father, or St Thomas Aquinas (see my next lecture) or St Bonaventure or some other Medieval Christian theologian—why they’re “traditionalists” when it comes to the Bible’s truth and authority, what would they say? Allow me to suggest a few answers that I think they might give in response to this question. These answers may help you decide for yourself whether the approach I’m describing makes sense, or whether it’s wiser instead to accept an inerrantist, or fundamentalist, understanding of Scripture.

Reason 1. The traditionalist view, unlike the inerrantist perspective, is better able (they would say) to account for the fact that words always mean less than we intend to put into them. We all know, of course, that in trying to formulate our aims or wishes or hopes, we can never quite say all that we mean; something is inevitably left out, or distorted, or stretched to fit the mold of the language we’re obliged to use. Surely this is all the more so for God’s intentions or meanings. It only makes sense to assume that in attempting to convey the Divine mind to mere mortals, merely mortal language is insufficient, and that an exhaustive communication of Truth is impossible. The Gospel of John concludes by emphasizing precisely this fact: “There are many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). The uncreated and eternal Word of God, which is nothing less than God’s very Mind, cannot help but stretch and shatter all created and temporal words. It would therefore be a mistake to go looking for a perfect duplicate or photocopy of that Mind in the pages of the Bible.

Reason 2. The traditionalist understanding of Scripture is consistent with the centuries-old Christian practice of regarding the Old Testament as no longer binding to the degree or in the way it once was. This is clearly the case when it comes to the Old Testament’s ritual and dietary laws. Meeting at a council in Jerusalem in 45 A.D. (see Acts 15:1-19), the apostles determined that male converts to Christianity did not need to be circumcised, even though this had been expressly commanded by God as an essential feature of His covenant with the Jews (see Genesis 17:9-14). Similarly, Jewish regulations concerning kosher foods were set aside by a vision of Peter’s in which he was instructed to kill and eat animals that were previously said to be “unclean” (Acts 10:9-16). But more than just changes in practice and more than just particular verses,

Christians from apostolic times on down have regarded the Old Testament as a whole as a preparation or prelude to a deeper understanding of God, an understanding that depends on His revelation in the Person of Christ. In the words of St Augustine (354-430), “The New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed” (*Anti-Pelagian Writings*, Ch. 27). Even though Jesus came “not to abolish the law and the prophets [that is, the Old Testament scriptures] ... but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17), it’s obvious to any careful student of the New Testament that this fulfillment required certain abridgements, abrogations, restructurings, and transformations. Read the rest of Matthew 5, for example, taking note of the contrast between “you have heard” and “I say to you”, and you’ll see what I mean. However one looks at this issue, it’s impossible for a Christian to think that the entire Bible is uniform or permanent in its expression of God’s will for man. While it *contains* truth, it’s not the Truth in Itself.

Reason 3. Setting aside the Old Testament and concentrating just on the New, it’s clear from certain disclaimers by the Biblical authors themselves that we needn’t suppose them to have been, on all occasions, the purveyors of an absolute or non-negotiable truth. On the contrary, as the traditionalist understanding of Scripture acknowledges, human opinion is sometimes consciously mixed in with God’s Word, as one sees for example in 1 Corinthians 7:8-12, where St Paul very carefully distinguishes what he himself believes from the teaching of “the Lord”. Not that Paul’s advice is insignificant; he is after all Christ’s apostle. But when an apostle explicitly tells his readers, as he does in this passage, that his teaching is less authoritative, and therefore less binding, than that of Christ, he surely means what he says, and we in turn would surely be mistaken if we regarded his personal views as infallible. This is one of the reasons it’s often necessary to consult extra-Scriptural sources, other parts of the broader Tradition, in order properly to understand the Bible’s more difficult texts—texts such as those in Paul’s epistles which St Peter references in 2 Peter 3:16. Take a look at the quotation from C. S. Lewis again, and note what he says about the need for reading the Bible “with attention to tradition and to interpreters wiser than ourselves”.

Reason 4. The traditionalist perspective on Scripture helps to explain certain undeniable inconsistencies in the Biblical narrative, inconsistencies at the level of historical fact, which serious Christians have always acknowledged and which range

from the trivial to the more substantial. What, for example, are we to suppose was really said and what really happened when St Peter first confessed that Jesus was the Christ? Each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke—called “synoptic” because they “see” things in a similar way in describing Christ’s life) tells the same story, but in a somewhat different way. Take a look for yourself at Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30, and Luke 9:18-20. Read these passages carefully, imagine yourself actually listening to Jesus, and ask yourself whether every word in each version could be a literally accurate rendition of what actually transpired? One notices other discrepancies that amount to direct contradictions, as in the reports of how Judas died after his betrayal of Christ. In Matthew 27:3-5, we’re told that he hanged himself, whereas in Acts 1:18 he’s said to have died by falling on the ground in a field. Read these passages in context for a full sense of all the differences. These examples are just the tip of the iceberg. A number of other such difficulties can be found in the Bible, and we’ll talk about a few of these in class.

Reason 5. A fifth and final—and in many ways the most important—reason for preferring the traditionalist perspective on the Bible over the inerrantist viewpoint is that by directing the reader’s attention away from the alleged verbal flawlessness of every Biblical passage, traditionalism opens Christian interpretation of Scripture to other, deeper, more spiritual levels of meaning. (These levels are enumerated and briefly described in the selection in the Reader by St Thomas Aquinas, and we’ll discuss them next time.) Indeed, the most prolific and influential of all the early Church fathers, Origen, went so far as to say that the Holy Spirit had deliberately allowed the human authors to introduce certain errors into the Biblical narrative so as to provoke future readers to dig beneath the literal level of meaning in search of hidden, spiritual truths. Perhaps the biggest problem with inerrantism or fundamentalism is that it risks missing out on some of the most important dimensions of God’s Revelation in Christ, for in its concern for maintaining a strictly literal level of truth, it has a tendency to lose sight of the forest for the trees.

In any case, for these and other similar reasons, I intend to follow C. S. Lewis’s lead this semester by searching for the Divine *content* of Scripture on the basis and in the light of a more ancient and more comprehensive Tradition.

At the same time, however—and it’s very important that you understand this as well—I intend to do all I can to avoid the opposite extreme from inerrantism: namely, the purely “horizontal” attitude of many modern Biblical scholars, who too often end up reducing the Scriptures to the merely mundane. Such scholars typically assume that the Bible is a purely human creation, conditioned by the time and place in which its authors lived, and that it’s meaning is therefore best understood as the product of various social, psychological, political, economic, and ideological forces and biases. This is a common, in fact the *most* common, academic approach to the Scriptures today among college and university (and in some cases even seminary) professors. It’s the approach Lewis alludes to when he speaks about the “up-grading” of human literature by God. His idea, remember, is that while the Bible was indeed written by human beings and is in that respect like other literature, it was nonetheless *lifted up* by God to serve as the “vehicle” of His word. But this being so, Lewis points out, “It will always be possible to ignore the up-grading and see nothing but the lower. Thus men can read the life of Our Lord (because it *is* a human life) as nothing but a human life.... Just in the same way Scripture can be read as merely human literature” (23).

When it is so read it’s almost always assumed by the modern scholars in question that any and every reference to the miraculous or the supernatural should be reinterpreted in a way that better suits the greater sophistication of modern scientific man. In other words—to put the matter more bluntly—it’s assumed that miracles don’t happen and that the authors of Scripture, lacking our modern understanding of nature’s laws, didn’t realize this, and tended therefore to explain unusual events as the effects of God’s intervention. Lewis refers to this typical modernist outlook on the very first page of the assigned reading. He’s sometimes suspected, he says, of being a “fundamentalist” himself—even though, for the reasons I’ve mentioned, he’s not—and this is because “I never regard any narrative as unhistorical simply on the ground that it includes the miraculous” (19). His point of view, he continues, is not based on a prior acceptance of every Biblical sentence as true—again he’s not an inerrantist—but rather on the fact that “I have never found any philosophical grounds for the universal negative proposition that miracles do not happen” (19).

Neither, I must echo Lewis, have I. On the contrary, it seems to me a rather easy matter to prove that miracles not only *can* but *must* happen, and if this were a course in philosophical theology (like my “Faith, Doubt, and God”), we might profitably spend some time on that task. Unfortunately, this isn’t something these more or less typical university scholars of Scripture seem to understand. Instead they too often prefer to engage in a process called “de-mythologization”, a fancy word that describes one especially virulent form of the modernist approach to the Bible, which was first promoted by a twentieth century German scholar named Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). According to Bultmann (to quote an often-quoted passage in his writings), “It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless, and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles”. The wireless? Just imagine what he’d say if he knew about smart phones! It follows for Bultmann, and others like him, that it’s impossible for modern people to take the Scriptures seriously until and unless the miraculous element is first eliminated. I don’t know whether there are any Bultmannians in my audience—or “Bult-maniacs”, as one of my faculty colleagues who *was* one used to call himself—but if there are, they would do well to consider the following words of the Catholic writer G. K. Chesterton:

“An imbecile habit has arisen in modern controversy of saying that such and such a creed can be held in one age but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century but not in the twentieth. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays.... What a man can believe depends on his philosophy, not upon the clock or the century. If a man believes in unalterable natural law, he cannot believe in any miracle in any age. If a man believes in a Will behind the law, he can believe in any miracle in any age” (see Chesterton’s wonderful book, *Orthodoxy*, Ch. V, “The Flag of the World”).

It’s never really been clear to me *why*, but it’s certainly true that the majority of modern scholars of Scripture—indeed most scholars of religion in general, people with jobs like mine in universities and colleges—seem to have adopted *unquestioned* the materialist’s view of reality, in which everything is to be explained scientifically. Naturally, therefore, when they look into the Bible and discover (as they must) certain stories involving miracles and supernatural phenomena, they’re obliged to assume that

the ancient authors of these texts were simply unable to distinguish between fact and fancy, between truth and myth. When the Biblical authors claimed, for example, that Jesus had risen from the dead or had performed some healing miracle, what they were *really* doing (these scholars assume) was reading into the real, non-miraculous situation their primitive, pre-scientific assumptions and expectations. It wasn't that they deliberately lied—most serious critics would never level that charge—but rather that the writers of Scripture lacked the intellectual sophistication to make a distinction between the possible and the impossible. (But see, on the contrary, 2 Peter 1:16-18.)

As traditionalists like Lewis and Chesterton (and your professor) see it, however, the question any serious inquirer must ask himself before doing anything else—before setting out to interpret specific Biblical stories or to come to grips with the basic doctrines of systematic theology—is this: *who exactly is the more sophisticated?* What is the distinctive mark or criterion of the broader, more open mind: the cognitive humility of the ancient writers, who did not suppose *a priori* that they understood how reality works and who were prepared to be surprised by the marvelous and unexpected, or the methodological arrogance of the modern scholar, who assumes that he does understand, and who comes to the Gospels and other Biblical books already convinced by the propagandists of modern scientism that miracles are impossible?

Well, given what I've been saying thus far in this lecture, you won't be surprised to hear that I myself am content neither with inerrantism nor with modernism. What I therefore plan to do this semester is to try to follow (like Lewis) a middle course, looking at the sacred Scriptures of the Christian Tradition as having come *neither* exclusively from God (as the inerrantists say) *nor* exclusively from man (as the modernists say), but rather (as 2 Peter would have it) from men-moved-by-God. It won't be until the last chapter of his book, Chapter 6, that Kallistos Ware explains to us his own way of approaching the scriptures, but as you'll see, he too endeavors to follow a *via media* or "middle way" on this matter, resisting the two extremes. If you'd like to take a quick peek ahead, see the last full paragraph on page 110 of *The Orthodox Way*.

### **Lecture 3:** **The Role of Reason in Theology**

We come now to the last of my introductory lectures. The aim of my presentations thus far has been to acquaint you with a number of important methodological and pedagogical points. I hope you haven't found it too tedious, but it seemed to me necessary, before we begin discussing Christian theology *per se*, to have a firm sense of exactly where we're headed and how I plan to get us there.

Our primary goal, as you know, is to understand Christianity by examining its fundamental doctrines. As I've explained more than once, this is *not* a course in the history of Christianity or in the sociology of the institutional Church or in the psychology of Christian behavior. Our aim instead is to clarify the traditional Christian vision of Reality—whatever the political uses and abuses of that vision may have been and whatever its effects on the lives of individual people. If they're honest, Christians must admit that the history of their religion has not been without its less than admirable moments, and they must be prepared to concede that traditional theological dogmas and doctrinal disputes have sometimes been the occasion for persecution and bloodshed. Nevertheless, regrettable though such facts may be, it would be illogical to think that they somehow invalidate the doctrines themselves. The mathematical truth that  $2 + 2 = 4$  can be used for either constructive or destructive ends: either (for example) in the collection and provision of food for the poor or in the production and deployment of weapons of mass destruction. But either way,  $2 + 2$  is *still* equal to 4. No proper use is needed to prove the fact, nor can any misuse destroy it. A skeptic, of course, may question my analogy: even supposing Christian doctrines are "true", could they ever be *as* true, or true in the same way, as a mathematical equation? This is an entirely reasonable question, but it's not history or sociology or psychology that can answer it. One must begin instead with a disciplined examination of the teachings themselves, taking them on their own terms, and this is precisely the aim of the "science" called theology.

In the last two lectures, we've been discussing the foundations of the specific theological science called systematics. I explained that unlike philosophical theology, which relies primarily on general or natural Revelation, systematic theology is based

upon special or supernatural Revelation, and that the primary instance of that Revelation for Christians is the Person of Jesus Christ, from whom all authentic Tradition is derived. Last time, we focused our attention on the Biblical dimension of this Tradition, looking specifically at three different views of the Bible's truth or authority. I spent most of that lecture making a case for what I called the traditionalist view of the scriptures, a view midway between the extremes of inerrantism and modernism and representing the consensus of most Christians through history. Unlike the inerrantist, the traditionalist is prepared to admit that the Bible was written by men who were active agents, not simply passive instruments, and he believes it would therefore be foolish to expect flawless results. On the other hand, unlike many contemporary Biblical scholars, the traditionalist believes that the Bible nonetheless contains and conveys a more than merely human Truth, and he therefore finds it absurd to read the Scriptures through the lens of modern scientific expectations and assumptions, as do the de-mythologizers and their ilk.

The differences between these three hermeneutical perspectives can perhaps be expressed by analogy. The inerrantist seems to think that the Bible is a transparent windowpane and that what we see as we look at it is the celestial radiance of the Divine Sun Itself. By contrast, the modernist pictures the Bible as if each of its books were a lantern or flashlight, each wielded by a different human author (or editorial board of such authors) and each rather dimly illuminating a different corner of some underground cavern. As for the traditionalist, he regards the Bible as a prism. Just as white light is broken into the multiple colors of the spectrum when it passes through a prism, so (the traditionalist believes) the absolute Truth of God's Word or *Logos* is refracted and divided as it passes through the minds and words of men. What we see in reading the Bible is a Divine and not a merely human light: it's really sunlight and not merely the beam of some lantern. But we do not see that Light as It exists in Itself. Or rather, we don't see It as long as we're simply looking *at* the words on a page of Scripture. We must instead look *along* those words, passing through them as it were into their essential meaning or substance, and in order to do this we need the teachings and spiritual methods afforded by a larger and more encompassing Tradition.

But there's something else we need, too—something I've not yet focused on in these early discussions. I've said that if we want to understand the meaning of the

Christian religion, we're going to have to rely on the reverberations of Revelation that Tradition supplies. But if we expect to be able to interpret those reverberations properly, we're also going to have to rely on and make use of our minds. In case you've not noticed, in the few short days we've been together, we've already been obliged to exert a considerable amount of brain-power. We've inspected a variety of premises and assumptions and presuppositions, and we've taken note where they lead: what conclusions must be drawn if such-and-such is the case, and what the alternatives might be if the conditions were different. Of course we've not attempted to prove anything from scratch. Like good systematic theologians, we've begun by assuming there really is a God and that Christian teachings about Him and His purposes are worth taking seriously. Nonetheless, given these assumptions, we've been busily trying to think some things through, comparing and contrasting perspectives and possibilities and endeavoring to come to a clearer understanding of various terms and ideas.

So far, however, we've not actually stopped to ask ourselves what may be expected from all this mental effort. We've not yet asked, in other words, what the role of such thinking is in theology, nor what its limits might be, nor what its relationship is with Divine Revelation. We need to begin doing precisely that here today, and it was with such an investigation in mind that I assigned the selection in the Reader by St Thomas Aquinas. As I trust you've discovered, it's a very rich piece of writing indeed, and there's obviously no way we can give it all the attention it deserves in a single class period. This (I should add) will be the case for *all* the selections in the Reader, any one of which might be examined in depth over the course of several days. Those of you who've taken one or more of my seminars are used to such leisurely explorations, but in a class like this my aims are different, and I don't intend to provide anything even approaching an exhaustive treatment of the materials in the Reader. I'll instead be concentrating on just a few points in each assignment, linking them to the main subject of the day. My primary aim is to give you the background and tools you need for your own further reflections and study. It's up to you, based on your careful study of each assignment in the Reader, to bring questions to class whenever something is puzzling or unclear. I'm very happy to address any and all concerns.

What I'd like us to focus on in this lecture is St Thomas's understanding of the role of reason or the place of rational argument in systematic theology. This is a very important issue to consider in setting off on an adventure like ours. Just in case you've never noticed, reason and rational argument are often in very short supply in our culture when it comes to religion and issues of faith! In my experience at least, it's common for most people, even most Christians, to act as if religion has little or nothing to do with man's reason and to assume instead that doctrines are a matter of *faith alone*. This being so, it's a good idea to examine the position of someone like Thomas, a medieval theologian who, like the great majority of great Christian thinkers through history, was convinced on the contrary that *reason and faith go hand in hand*, that they're complementary powers or faculties, which together can lead man to certainty concerning God and to eternal happiness in Him.

Reason tends to be very closely linked for many today—whether they're fully conscious of this fact or not—with the methods and assumptions of the empirical sciences, and the result of this linkage is what we might simply call “rationalism”. Rational behavior, people tend to assume, is behavior that is consistent with the things we can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell, and logical thinking is thinking that conforms to the nature and limits of physical, material, quantifiable things. It would follow of course (if all this were true) that any desire we might have to know something *beyond* the empirical level of apprehension—something of a *metaphysical* order, which *can't* be seen, heard, tasted, touched, or smelled—must be *irrational* and absurd. Unless I'm mistaken, many Christians have themselves adopted this rationalist perspective in their day-to-day lives, and as a result they're often mistrustful of their own religious convictions, keeping them isolated as private and debatable opinions. And the upshot is a kind of schizophrenia, with people trying to believe with one half of their minds while reasoning with the other. The technical name for this pathological condition is *fideism*. The word comes from the Latin term *fides*, which simply means “faith”, and it refers to the claim that a person's relationship with God can never be more than a matter of “blind” faith, involving a sort of leap in the dark. No one can ever know with certainty (the fideists say) whether there is a God, or an afterlife, or even any meaning in *this* life. The best we can do is to trust

and hope, while leaving reason and logic and knowledge and certainty to the folks in the white coats in the laboratories.

It's important to understand that this way of looking at the relationship between faith and reason is by far the *exception* in the history of Christian thought. There were, admittedly, a few theologians in the past who were fideists. In the early third century, for example, there was a man named Tertullian (*c.* 160 – *c.* 225), who expressed his fideistic views in a famous pair of rhetorical questions: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has philosophy to do with faith?” The answer, as he obviously intended to imply, was “nothing”, since (for him) reasoning, symbolized by Athens, and believing, symbolized by Jerusalem, were completely separate, mutually exclusive activities. *Certum est quia impossibile est*, wrote Tertullian: “A matter of faith is *certain* precisely because it is logically *impossible!*” This oxymoron always reminds me of the story about the little boy who came home from Sunday School and told his parents that the teacher had been explaining the meaning of faith. Faith, he'd learned, is believing what you know isn't true! Perhaps some of you have also had fideists for Sunday School teachers. The father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther (1483-1546), held a similar view to Tertullian's. In fact, Luther once went so far as to compare reason to a whore or prostitute, and his counsel, obviously, was to stay away from her and to avoid her seductions. “Keep to revelation,” Luther wrote, “and don't try to understand anything. For by this ‘understanding,’” he said, “Satan means to draw you into the abyss!” As it turns out, however, Tertullian and Luther are by far the rare exceptions, for *most* Christian authorities, from the early Church fathers down to modern times, have insisted that our minds are a gift from God, and that, if rightly used, human reasoning can serve to confirm and enhance human faith.

As you've seen from your reading, this is certainly the position of St Thomas Aquinas. St Thomas (*c.* 1225 - 74) is without doubt one of the greatest theologians of history, a man regarded by the Roman Catholic Church, the largest Christian body in the world, as its premier theological authority of all time. Aquinas, if anyone, may therefore be safely accepted as representing “mainstream” Christian thinking, and we'll be taking his views on the relationship between reason and faith, in their essentials at least, as our standard this semester.

The selection in the Reader has been taken from St Thomas's greatest work, the *Summa Theologica*, an encyclopedic systematic theology covering many hundreds of pages and published today in several volumes, a work in which he attempted to sum up (that's what the word *summa* means in Latin) the entire corpus of traditional Christian teaching. Everything you ever wanted to know about Christian beliefs, from the kinds and properties of angels to the punishments of the damned, to the number and nature of the sacraments, to the relationship between virtue and prayer, can be found in this work. Actually, the *Summa* includes some philosophical theology, too. In one of the many hundreds of articles that are to be found in this monumental work, the author proposes five ways of proving the existence of God, and these have since become standard methods of demonstration for many theologians and philosophers. But most of the *Summa* is "systematic" in character, and its author is therefore obliged to explain at the very start—in Part One, Question 1, which is what you were assigned in the Reader—precisely how his reasonings are related to special Revelation, which of course is the foundation of all systematic theological thinking. This he does in a section headed "The Nature and Domain of Sacred Doctrine". To express this title in the terms of our course, we might call it instead "The Distinguishing Marks and Boundaries of Systematic Theology".

I should say a couple of words about St Thomas's method and style of writing, which can be a little confusing for the novice. Like most of his theological peers in the thirteenth century—a group of Christian thinkers whom we call the "Scholastics"—Thomas made use of a special method of argumentation in which an author attempts not simply to state his own position, but to anticipate all the possible objections that might be raised by people who have different views on the subject. Hence each of the articles of his treatise follows the same basic pattern: he raises a question (whether such and such is the case), he describes the positions of those who disagree with him in a series of "objections", he then gives what he thinks is the best answer to the question, and finally he responds point by point to the objections of his opponents in a series of "replies". As you can see, while the style may at first seem convoluted, it is itself a sign of the great value he places on reason and rational argument.

The whole of this section of the *Summa* is important in addressing the issue of how reason fits into the theological enterprise, and I encourage you to study it with great care. We'll want to discuss what he says at greater length in class, but for now let me just highlight a few key points from the reading. I'll try to paraphrase what I take to be the most important idea in each of the ten articles you've read.

Article 1. According to St Thomas, the reality of God can be logically demonstrated by means of what he calls (in what was probably a rather confusing phrase) the "part of philosophy called theology". What he's talking about is simply what I've been calling philosophical theology, the sort of theology in other words which is based on general or natural Revelation and which attempts to prove the *existence* of an intelligent Cause or Divine Source of what we see in the world. On the other hand, the *nature* or *essence* of God (says Thomas) is beyond what human reason can comprehend philosophically, and hence beyond the range of that kind of theology. Therefore, if man is to have any genuine knowledge of the Divine essence, that is, of God as He really is in Himself and of His will for mankind, such knowledge must be specially or supernaturally revealed. The results of this Revelation, the basic truths of the Christian faith, go to make up what Thomas calls *doctrina sacra* or "sacred doctrine", and it's this in turn that provides the raw material or data for systematic theology.

Article 2. In Thomas's view, systematic theology is a *science*. I've also been using this word in my lectures, calling our subject the "science of God and of deification". The Latin word in the author's original text, here translated by the English "science", is *scientia*, a term that refers to any sort of organized knowledge. For reasons already mentioned, the use of the word "science" in this connection can be rather misleading to modern ears, since for us science is almost exclusively confined to empirical, measurable, physical things—hence, again, the rampant fideism of our times. But Aquinas is clearly no fideist. He believes that it's possible for human beings to come to *know* about God with perfect certitude; and theology, he contends—based as it is upon certain fundamental principles that God Himself has revealed—is the appropriate science for doing just that.

Article 3. Theology is all about God. No matter how great the apparent diversity of its subject matter, *sacra doctrina* is a single science, and as such it's concerned

fundamentally with only one thing, namely, God Himself. “Sacred doctrine,” Thomas writes, “does not treat of God and creatures equally, but of God primarily, and of creatures only so far as they are referable to God as their beginning or end” (6). The fact that theological topics, from sin to salvation and from baptism to the beatific vision, are always examined in relation to God—the One who got everything started and the One whom all things are meant to seek as their highest good—will perhaps help to explain the organization of the book we’re reading by Kallistos Ware. If you’ve looked at the table of contents, you’ll have seen that every chapter in Ware begins with the words “God as”. Thus there is “God as Mystery” (Ch. 1), “God as Trinity” (Ch. 2), “God as Creator” (Ch. 3), “God as Man” (Ch. 4), “God as Spirit” (Ch. 5), “God as Prayer” (Ch. 6), and “God as Eternity” (Epilogue). Like St Thomas, and like every other *systematic* theologian, Ware presents the entire range of Christian doctrine in continual reference to God.

Article 4. Theology includes both speculative and practical aspects. St Thomas is reminding us of what I’ve already told you about the branches or kinds of theology. Systematic and philosophical theology are primarily (in his words) *speculative* or *theoretical* sciences; they’re concerned with describing and defending the Christian Map of Reality. On the other hand, moral and ascetical theology are primarily (again to use his terms) *practical* sciences; they’re concerned with applying and verifying that Map in one’s own experience.

Article 5. According to the author, systematic theology is the noblest of the sciences—in other words, the highest of all the forms of knowledge. Perhaps you’ve heard the medieval saying: “Theology is the queen of the sciences”. In other words, it’s the subject of study to which all other subjects are subservient. In the college curriculum of the European Middle Ages it was understood that by learning first a number of other, preparatory forms of knowledge—notably, the seven liberal arts of grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy—you were training and disciplining your mind for a better grasp of the highest and most important subject: theology. Please notice that an acceptance of what St Thomas says on this score would mean a dramatic reversal of the modern view of reality—to say nothing of our whole educational system! In his view, not only *can* we know God, a claim of course which many people today would dispute; our knowledge of God is for him *more certain* than our knowledge of

anything else. Thomas here shares the conviction of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, that Divine Principles can be grasped with total certainty, whereas the physical things of this world, which seem to most of us so solid and “real”, can only be guessed at. Moreover, theology’s queenly nobility or supremacy can be deduced from the fact that its ultimate purpose is “eternal beatitude” (9). In other words, the final proof of Christian theology’s truth is provided in the experience of sanctification. I’ll come back to this point at the end of this lecture.

Article 6. Nothing much new is offered us in this article, at least as I read it. Aquinas reiterates the point that theology is a true or veridical science, though now he uses another Latin term, *sapientia*, which the translator has rendered as “wisdom”. Once again our saint seems to be insisting that sacred doctrine and systematic theology aren’t merely a matter of hunches and opinions, but of genuine insight into the nature of Reality; and that the wisest person is the person who keeps his mind focused on “the highest cause of the whole universe” (10). He’s repeating himself—but then the point is so important, the repetition is advisable.

Article 7. This article, too, is more or less a recapitulation, in this case of Article 3. The basic idea, once again, is that the knowledge of God is the primary object or aim of all theology. “All things,” he says, “are treated under the aspect of God, either because they are God Himself, or because they refer to God as to their beginning and end” (12). We could put it this way: God is the Center of that sphere called reality, and every point on the circumference of the sphere is inevitably connected to Him by a radius. Keep this image in mind; we’ll come back to it later when we discuss various definitions of God that attempt to convey His “mystery”.

Article 8. This is the most important section of all for understanding the relationship between reason and faith. Someone might object, says St Thomas, that with all of his insistence on science and wisdom, he’s forgotten the importance of faith. Not so, he replies. On the contrary, he’s the first to admit that the “principles” of theology (as he calls them) must at first be accepted on faith. No one can be a theologian who is unwilling to “suspend his disbelief” (to borrow an expression from the poet Coleridge) and to trust certain claims on a provisional and experimental basis, accepting them as veridical statements about The Way Things Really Are. But once this trust is in place,

reason may then set to work on these claims, and its work is three-fold: first, it can help to *clarify* the principles or starting-points of theology; second, it can proceed to prove *other* things that are logically linked to the principles; and third, it can play a *defensive* role by answering the skeptic’s objections to the basic claims of faith. In this whole process, the theologian (says Aquinas) is obliged to make use of three things: the Holy Scriptures, the “doctors of the Church”, and the ideas of certain pre-Christian philosophers (see 14). By “doctors” of the Church he doesn’t mean *medical* doctors or physicians, but rather certain great teaching saints of the Christian Tradition—authorities like Augustine, Jerome, Dionysius the Areopagite (whom we’ll be reading soon), John of Damascus, Ambrose, Boethius, and Gregory of Nyssa—to mention only those figures whom Thomas himself refers to in what you’ve read. When it comes to the philosophical insights of pre-Christian authors, the philosopher whom Thomas himself most relied on was Aristotle, though he was also deeply influenced by Plato. There’s no reason, in Thomas’s view, for a Christian to hesitate in making use of the insights and truths that can be found in the teachings of philosophical and religious traditions other than his own.

Article 9. We would probably do well to put this article aside for the moment, for it’s actually more directly relevant to our upcoming discussion—beginning with the first chapter of Ware—of “God as Mystery”. Aquinas’s main point in this section is that God transcends what the human mind is fully capable of taking in, and that this being so, it’s only natural that the Bible should make use of metaphors and symbols in describing Him, for it’s in this way alone that we can begin to glimpse what God is truly like. Try to remember these observations when we turn to Chapter 1. We’ll flesh them out more fully at that point.

Article 10. Finally, the last of the articles is closely connected, as I hope you’ve noticed, to our previous discussions concerning the Bible’s meaning and authority. As you’ll remember, one of the reasons I offered in my last lecture for preferring the “traditionalist” understanding of Scripture is that it helps us avoid confining our attention to a single level of meaning, namely, the literal or exoteric level, which tends to be the focus of most inerrantist interpretations of Scripture. St Thomas teaches, by contrast, that the Bible is to be read in a way that brings out its multiple levels of meaning, and in saying this he’s in full agreement with many other great theologians of history. You may

have been a little confused when he talks about the “literal” sense, because he actually uses this word in two different ways: on the one hand, literal refers—as we would expect—to the basic historical narrative (the facts and events); on the other hand, it can also mean whatever God intended to communicate through the human authors of Scripture, and in this second sense it includes three spiritual levels of meaning: allegorical, moral, and anagogical. It’s the task of theological reasoning (says Thomas) to discover these many meanings and to extract from them a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of Christian doctrines.

We’ll have a chance to discuss these points more thoroughly in class. For the moment, however—as I bring this lecture to a close—allow me to add one final thought, on a somewhat different (though closely related) subject. Before we move forward next time to our initial discussion of theology proper, I want to go back to what St Thomas said in Articles 4 and 5 (pages 8 and 9 of the Reader) about “eternal beatitude”, or salvation, as the ultimate purpose of systematic theology.

Obviously, having listened to all that’s been said in these opening lectures, a skeptical person is going to remain *far* from satisfied by my approach in this course. “Why should I accept all this nonsense?” he will probably ask. “Christianity, like every religion, is just a human invention. Why believe in it, anyway? And why should anyone accept this man Thomas’s so-called ‘revealed principles’ in the first place?” If anyone in the class is asking himself such questions right now—and I’d be very surprised if *no* one is, for even believers often have a skeptic inside them—I would like to anticipate certain points we’ll go into more completely later on by summing up the response a systematic theologian would try to give to such skeptical queries.

“Look,” the theologian is going to reply, “I admit that spiritual truths can’t be demonstrated or proven in the strictly empirical or sensory terms that modern people typically insist on. If you really want to understand the Christian claims, you’re going to have to follow a *spiritual* method instead, one that will help to transform your vision in such a way that you can then see for yourself, with an *extrasensory* mode of awareness, what really is true. Now of course, this method is based on certain prerequisites. It requires, in particular, that you follow the steps implicit in Aquinas’s Eighth Article. To be more precise, you’re going to have to suspend your present disbelief in such things as

the Bible and creeds, and begin acting in accordance with a system of moral and ritual discipline. You (the skeptic) may object that this process is ‘circular’, that you’re being asked to accept what is supposed to be proven. But in fact, if you think about it, the method I’m recommending you follow is precisely (if paradoxically) that of the modern scientist himself, who accepts certain theories in a provisional way in order to test and possibly confirm them in his laboratory. Whether its physics or religion, you can’t remain outside and aloof from the process: it’s essential that one enter the ‘lab’ to conduct the appropriate tests.

“Here’s how the Christian test works,” the systematic theologian might continue. “Christianity asks that its critics make the ‘experiment’ of accepting certain doctrines on *faith* while at the same time applying their *reason* to two sets of data, one set internal and the other external. By *internal* data, the Tradition means the disclosures and promptings of one’s conscience, and by *external* data it’s referring (among other things) to the existence of saints, people whose lives fully accord with what conscience requires. The saint is a person who thinks, wills, and acts in complete consistency with the ‘law of love’—to put the matter very briefly for now. But a saint is also a person whose accordance and consistency have resulted, by his own admission, from living the life that his Tradition requires. If as Christ taught one can know a tree by its fruits (see Matt. 7:20), and if the fruit of religion is sanctity, then the existence of Christian saints is a *proof*, a fully *rational* proof, of the effectiveness of the Christian Tradition—including its Scriptures, which are commended for study, and its creeds and symbols and the oral teachings of its sages, which are promulgated for the proper interpretation of those Scriptures. This, of course, is just the beginning. The ‘experiment’ of faith is finished and the Christian hypothesis verified,” the theologian concludes, “only when the initial belief or faith of the spiritual ‘scientist’ has been confirmed, and then transcended, in direct experience—only when the Tradition has produced a new saint in oneself, this being the ultimate goal of all religion.”

If you’re thinking I’m getting *way* ahead of the story, you’re right! It will be quite awhile before we’re in a position to talk about Christian views of salvation and the existence, and ultimate significance, of Christian saints. But I wanted you to see how this

preliminary discussion of the role of reason fits into the larger picture. Consider it a preview of coming attractions.

**Lecture 4:**  
**Systematics: Saying the Unsayable**

This is a course in systematic theology, and systematics is concerned with the exposition of doctrine. Its aim is to clarify the meaning of Christian teachings.

I've compared what it provides with a map, and we could say by extension that the systematic theologian is like a cartographer. His work consists in describing and plotting the major features of the Christian landscape, both individually and in their relationship to other points in that landscape. To speak of relationship is to recall something I said in the syllabus. I explained there that the goal of systematic theology is "to understand the essential doctrines of Christianity as *organically* related parts of a single metaphysical, spiritual, and cosmological system". Each of the basic truths of this system is like an organ in the body, having its own particular function or significance, but at the same time contributing to the function and significance of other beliefs in the system. Our lungs and hearts and kidneys serve different purposes, and yet the health of each is dependent on the proper functioning of all. In the same way Christian doctrines concerning the creation of the world and the fall and of salvation and life after death, while having their own specific formulations and intentions, depend on each other for their full significance in the overall system. But whether the analogy is cartography or anatomy, it's the fact of inter-relations that's crucial. For systematic theology *is* "systematic" precisely insofar as it's concerned with the connections or links between individual Christian teachings and insofar as it examines those teachings as essential parts of a larger whole. I encourage you to keep focused on these links throughout the term, tempting though it may be to get caught up in trying to fathom any given doctrine on its own.

In order to accentuate this stress on connections, it will be helpful from time to time to make use of an outline that I'll show you in class. Of course, like any outline, it's very far from complete. The point is by no means to enumerate every doctrine or dogma, but to keep us centered on some of the most essential. Reduced to a bare minimum, systematic theology is concerned with the connections between three basic sets of beliefs. And thus, whether your perspective happens to be Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or

Protestant, you could say that all Christian theology is fundamentally Trinitarian in structure, as if reflecting the very nature of God Himself. (We'll be saying much more about the doctrine of the Trinity when we discuss the next chapter of Ware.) To be specific, whatever else the theologian may be obliged to add to his outline and whatever refinements it may undergo, it must include at the very least the following indispensable ingredients: first, a Doctrine of God; second, a Doctrine of Man; and third, a Doctrine of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. To put the matter in a more metaphysical way: all Christian theology must deal at some point, first, with the ultimate Cause of all things; second, with the most important effect of that Cause, created (as the Bible says) in Its "image and likeness" (Gen. 1:26); and third with the fusion or interpenetration between that Cause and this effect. I realize this is a rather abstract way of talking, but do your best to get your mind wrapped around this formulation, for it's crucial to any deep understanding of the Christian religion.

Taking a further step, we find that each of these three basic doctrines includes two subordinate points, as if reflecting the two natures of Christ. (These "natures" and their "hypostatic union", so essential to Christian theology, will be considered at great detail when we talk about Chapter 4 of *The Orthodox Way*.) Under the first heading of *God*, theology is concerned on the one hand with the question of who or what God *is* and on the other hand with the question of what God *does*; in other words, it attempts to understand the nature or the essence of God and His operation or function, His actions and works. Under the second heading of *Man*, theology again makes a distinction between two distinct points: it's concerned on the one hand with Man as he *was* when he first entered the world, and on the other hand with what Man now *is* in his present condition. As most of you know, I'm sure, this distinction is based upon what Christians call the Fall. Like all the world's major religions, Christianity teaches that the human being has ceased to be what he should be, that something has gone wrong with man and (as a result) with his world. Hindus describe the human problem in terms of ignorance, Buddhists in terms of suffering, Taoists in terms of disequilibrium, Muslims in terms of rebellion. For Christians man's fundamental problem is pictured as the result of a "Fall", and it's linked with the Biblical story in Genesis 3 about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and man's disobedience in first tasting its forbidden fruit. But whatever

the details (which we'll be looking at later), the point for right now is simply this: Christians believe we *are* no longer what we *were*; our present tense is radically different from our past tense. Finally—to come back to the outline—under the third major heading of *God-Man*, we encounter yet another distinction, once again between action and being. Systematic theology is concerned on the one hand with what the God-Man, Jesus Christ, has *done* on behalf of mankind, and on the other hand with what or who He *is*; it considers, in other words, both His function or deeds and His essence or nature.

Now I've said that systematics is focused on the links between these basic doctrines, that it's interested in relationships and interconnections. With this outline and its several distinctions in mind, I could anticipate our entire semester and the principal links in this way: Systematic theology is concerned with clarifying and explaining the fact that II.B. has been changed into II.A. as the result of III.A. repeating I.B, which would not have been possible if III.B. were not the same as I.A. (This will make a lot more sense—trust me!—when you have the outline itself to look at in class.) In other words—to translate that mouthful from “mathematics” into English—Christians believe that fallen man has been and is being restored to his former glory as the result of the saving action of Christ, an action which consists in a “repetition” of the original creation of man and which thereby reveals or implies an essential identity between Jesus and God. To add three further linking terms to this overall picture, we could say that because *Salvation* implies *Creation*, there must be *Incarnation*. This is the very heart of the Christian faith, and it's this central claim the systematic theologian seeks to understand.

But I'm going too fast. Before delving into all these subtle relationships, it's vital that we first try to grasp what Christians mean by the very first point in our outline. Obviously, if we want to understand creation, salvation, and incarnation, and how they're interlinked with each other, we must know something about the Being who is responsible for these several actions, the One who acts as the Creator, the Savior, and the “Incarnator” (to make up a word). And this means that we must turn our attention first to the nature of God. As you should know from your reading, this is the subject of the first chapter of Kallistos Ware's book. In fact, as you've seen if you've glanced ahead, the first *two* chapters of *The Orthodox Way* are both concerned with I.A. in this outline—with the question, in other words, of who or what God is. Chapter 1 deals with the Divine

Reality insofar as It is a single nature or essence, whereas Chapter 2 will concentrate on that same Reality insofar as It embraces a plurality of Persons. What we get first (to use some technical language) is an ontology of God as such, which will then be followed by an exploration of the doctrine of the Trinity.

According to Ware, the most important thing for us to know first about God-as-such or the Divine essence is that God is a “mystery”. Our author is using this term in a very specific philosophical or theological sense. He doesn’t mean that God is like an Agatha Christie or P. D. James adventure or some other detective story; it’s not *that* kind of mystery. Nor is he using the term in the way people sometimes do when they wish to refer to something they regard as impossibly vague: “It’s a mystery to me” is a phrase that usually refers in common slang to something the speaker has no hope, and perhaps no particular wish, to grasp, and it’s often used to rationalize an unwillingness to pursue the matter further. “Oh, it’s all just a mystery!” Obviously Ware doesn’t mean this *either* by “mystery”, for he wants us to be theologians and to pursue the question of God as deeply, and as intelligently, as we possibly can.

The word is being used in our book in close connection with its etymological origins. Like the word *mystic*, the term *mystery* is derived from an ancient Greek root, the verb *myein*, which means “to close” the eyes or mouth (see Ware, 15). This was a word used in Hellenistic times—roughly 300 B.C. to 300 A.D.—for what was required of the neophytes or candidates for initiation into the ancient Eleusinian and other Greek “mystery religions” (as they’re called by the scholars). As Ware points out, induction into these religions, which corresponded to the Christian sacramental rite of baptism, involved the enactment of a ceremonial drama to which the candidate had been brought blindfolded and from which he departed with a vow of silence. Thus both his eyes and his lips had been sealed or “closed” for the sake of secrecy. Now of course the neophyte into these ancient pagan traditions *did* in fact see something when the bandages were removed from his eyes, and of course he *could* have described it afterwards had he broken his oath, as obviously some people did—otherwise we wouldn’t know what had happened. Their eyes had been only temporally or accidentally shut, and their lips had been only provisionally, and not necessarily, sealed. And yet from all accounts, it seems these religions were intended to bring their adherents into contact with Something that human

eyes not only *did* not but *could* not see, and Something that human language not only *should* not but *could* not fully communicate. Hence the meaning which the cognate words *mystic* and *mysticism* have acquired in English today. The mystic, we might say, is the person who's experienced a Reality that is at once invisible (or non-empirical) and ineffable: In encountering this Reality, his usual means of knowledge are suspended or transcended; and in attempting to communicate the experience, he's obliged to go beyond what ordinarily human language is able to convey. The *mystic* has been made aware of a *mystery*, which—using Ware's definition—is “something that is *revealed* for our understanding, but which we never understand *exhaustively*” (15). Therefore, whatever else it might be, a mystery is something that remains hidden even in the midst of our seeing it, or (conversely) it's something that comes to be known by the very means of our ignorance. This seems to be what St Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 2:6-7 when he talks about *speaking* the *hidden* wisdom of God in a *mystery*. “We speak wisdom,” he writes, “among them that are perfect [interestingly enough, his word for the “perfect”, *teleiois* in Greek, is the same word that was used for the initiates in the mystery religions]; yet not the wisdom of this world.... But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory.” Paul goes on to add in verse 10 of the same chapter that the Divine mystery has been revealed by the Holy Spirit, which “searches all things, even the very depths of God”.

So what's the point? The point, given these meanings of “mystery”, is that in dealing with this strikingly strange thing called *God* we're going to be dealing with Something that exceeds, violates, undercuts, and suspends all our usual conceptual categories. For how can one and the same Reality be simultaneously revealed and concealed? If It really is “hidden”, how could a human being nonetheless discern and describe Its glory? Isn't glory—you might ask—“bright” and “ostentatious” and (well) “obvious”? Sure it is! So how could a thing that remains essentially occluded and cloaked, forever veiled from our eyes, be regarded as glorious? “How *can* these things be?!”, as the Virgin Mary asked the Archangel Gabriel (see Luke 1:34 for one of history's most important encounters between man and Mystery).

Well, as you should have picked up from your reading, the theologian answers these understandable questions by calling attention to what Ware calls the “two poles” in

man's experience of God. To say that God is a mystery is to say by that very fact that there's a certain duality or polarity underlying our relationship with Him and that He therefore appears to us as a union of apparent contraries, or as embracing complementary opposites. Now please understand something extremely important here: in saying that God appears as a union of *contraries* or *opposites*, I don't at all mean to suggest that God is a *contradiction* in terms. He's a mystery indeed, but He's not an absurdity. He's not, for example, like a square circle or married bachelor, or some other sheer impossibility—whatever someone like Tertullian might think! And theology is therefore not an exercise in illogical thinking. Rather, God is like light (we might say), which the physicists tell us is at once a wave and a particle, something in other words that exhibits opposite properties and that seems to function in ways that defy our usual assumptions.

In God's case, these opposites are often expressed by the words absoluteness and infinitude. On the one hand, the Divine is the Absolute, by which we mean that It cannot not be. God is necessary to everything else that exists—He is the *unum necessarium*, that is, “the one thing necessary”, the sole essential Reality—while at the same time He Himself is dependent on nothing. He alone possesses the property that late medieval theologians like Duns Scotus (*c.* 1265 - 1308) called *aseitas* or “aseity”, which means that He is “from Himself” alone. Furthermore, because He is absolute, God is also transcendent: He goes beyond or exceeds or surpasses the universe, existing in a dimension of His very own, far beyond even the most distant galaxy. On the other hand—and now we turn to the complementary, and opposite, pole of God's nature—He is also the Infinite. Because He is absolute, God is altogether undetermined and unaffected by anything, whether we're talking about other beings or such conditions of existence as space and time. He's completely free, in other words, from all restrictions, having no boundaries or edges or limits. Being absolute, He's altogether *unlimited*; this is what it means to say that He's “infinite”. But now notice this. Since He *is* infinite, there's nothing that can “hold God in”, as it were. His Reality therefore inevitably overflows Its non-existent boundaries, manifesting Itself throughout His creation. Hence we must say that God is equally *immanent*. (He's also “imminent” and “eminent”, but these are different ideas, so do note the spelling, and if you're not sure of the differences, consult your dictionary.) Although He transcends or exceeds everything that exists, He at the

same time dwells or abides *within* everything that exists, even the tiniest of His creatures. Thus He is at once both beyond and within: higher than the stars, and yet deeper and more intimately interwoven into the very substance of things than the smallest of subatomic particles.

I should perhaps point out at this juncture that in acknowledging this Divine polarity or duality, Christian theology is far from unique. In fact, as those of you know who've taken my introductory course in world religions (Religious Studies 120), the distinction I'm making here is common to every major tradition. A Jew, for example, would completely agree with the claim that God is both beyond and within, and he might well quote from the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) the words of the prophet Isaiah: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways" (Isa. 55:8) to express the Divine transcendence; and on the other hand the Psalmist's words: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" (Ps 139:7) to express the immanence. The Muslim too shares the same basic conception. The *shahādah* or basic creed of Islam, *Lā ilāha illā 'Llāh* ("There is no god but God"), is meant to stress God's absolute incomparability; and yet at the same time the Muslim Bible, the Qur'an, can ask rhetorically, "Is He not nearer than the vein of thy neck?" (*Surah* 6:12 and 59). Other sacred scriptures and classic religious sources could be cited to show the universality of this "polar" understanding of God.

We need to be very careful how we go about trying to understand this idea, however. I know from experience (both with myself and with others) that, in putting things as I have so far, I may well have created a false and misleading impression. Unless you're already skilled in theological subtleties, I've almost certainly left you thinking that God is some *thing*. In fact I've used that very word myself. I spoke just a moment ago of "this strikingly strange thing called *God*". But that's actually totally wrong. God is *not* a "thing" or a "something". In fact one of the reasons the theologian stresses the opposite poles of God's nature is to break down our attachment to things and our conception of objects. As I've described Him so far, it will have sounded perhaps as though God were one sort of being among others. On the absolute and transcendent side of the matter, it may have seemed to you as though God were a really huge though distant entity, so big that even the most humongous of interstellar phenomena would be eclipsed by

comparison. And on the infinite and immanent side, my descriptions may have led you to picture God as an extremely fine liquid substance, or perhaps as an invisible force like an electric or magnetic current, flowing in the spaces between things and seeping into their pores.

But the truth of the matter is far more strange and flummoxing. To say that God is transcendent is not simply to say that He's way, way "up" there at some sort of spatial remove from our planet. No, it's to say finally—are you ready for this?—that *He doesn't even exist* in our terms. For to the extent that we've really begun to grasp the concept of Divine absoluteness, we must admit (says the theologian) that God is *unlike* everything else we know and everything else we think—that He's so completely and radically different, in fact, that it would be a mistake even to say that He *is*, for our human conception of "isness" is derived after all from the things of this world, than which God is utterly other. If *He* is, then *they* aren't, and if they *are*, then He *isn't*. You simply can't have it both ways. On the other hand—switching once more to the opposite pole—to say that God is immanent is not merely to say that God is close or accessible or available or intimately intertwined within the fabric of creatures. It's to say finally that *whatever exists really is none other than God*. It's not just that God is "inside" of things or that He passes "through" things like an electric current or ether. He actually *is* those things—or, better, those things *are* God—whether we happen to notice this incredible fact or not. To the extent that we truly understand what's at stake with the Divine infinitude, we must admit that all things are essentially God and that their seeming individuality and independence is no more than illusion.

Now you must realize something very important here. Your professor has just come very dangerously close to uttering horrendous blasphemy! He has offered two comments which, if taken in isolation from each other, are exceedingly volatile, and which, if left unchecked and unqualified, could explode in our faces, leading the unsuspecting Christian to disastrous intellectual and moral consequences. It's rather like salt. In combination with sodium, chlorine is perfectly safe, if used in moderation at least, but left on its own it can kill you. So it is also, by analogy, in the case of the two poles of God—though in this case either of them on its own is poison. I've said that in His transcendence "God doesn't really exist" and that in His immanence "whatever exists

really is *really* God”. But obviously, if left unqualified by its opposite, the former statement is going to lead us to *atheism*, whereas the latter proposition amounts to nothing but *pantheism*. Well, let me quickly guard myself against a lightning bolt of heavenly vengeance by assuring you that traditional Christians are neither atheists nor pantheists. They do *not* deny there’s a God—that’s atheism—*nor* do they think that the universe and God are two names for the same reality, which is the pantheist claim. They believe instead that God exists *and* that the world exists, *and* that there’s a distinction between them, between the Creator and His creation. But at the same time they know that the two sides of this distinction are completely incomparable and asymmetrical and that it would be a grave mistake to go around thinking of God as if He could be located on a sort of mental grid in a place or at a position either outside or inside the world.

As Ware points out, it’s common in the Orthodox world for theologians to talk about the mystery of Divine “polarity”—the oppositional complementarity that exists between God’s absoluteness and infinitude—by using the terms *essence* and *energies*. This is a technical distinction which goes back to such early Church fathers as St Athanasius (c. 296 - 373) and St Basil (c. 330 - 79), though it was a fourteenth century saint, Gregory Palamas (c. 1296 - 1359), who first gave it the prominence it has in theology today. To quote from our book, “To indicate the two ‘poles’ of God’s relationship with us—unknown yet well known, hidden yet revealed—the Orthodox tradition draws a distinction between the essence, nature, or inner being of God, on the one hand, and his energies, operations, or acts of power, on the other”. Ware goes on to clarify that “the essence signifies the radical transcendence of God; the energies, his immanence and omnipresence” (21-22). The phrase “acts of power” might be a little misleading, however, and our author is therefore quick to point out that the “acts” in question are not something separate or different from God, nor just a part of God. When we turn to I.B. of the outline, we’ll be looking at certain mighty deeds of God, notably His work of creation, but at this point we’re still focused on I.A., and the word *energies* is intended to signify, quite apart from any particular operation or deed, the intrinsic power of God as such, which is presupposed by any given operation. To use my earlier image, the energies are the inevitable spilling over and radiation of God throughout His “full

extent”, which is nothing short of the whole universe, while the essence is a name for the inward simplicity, stability, and independence of God as He is in Himself.

Now obviously it’s impossible to capture all these nuances with mere words. Theology is forever trying to catch its own tail as it seeks to express this and other inexpressible mysteries. How to communicate at least something of the truth? Many different strategies and approaches have been used. One of the most famous is found in a classic definition of God that can be traced back at least as far as the medieval Catholic theologian St Bonaventure (1217-74), whose biography of St Francis of Assisi you’ll be reading later this term. According to Bonaventure, God is *an intelligible sphere the center of which is everywhere, but the circumference nowhere*. This image is apt because the sphere is traditionally understood to be the most perfect of geometrical shapes in that all of its points are equidistant from a common center. The center of this particular sphere—this Divine “globe”, we might say—turns out to be “everywhere”, however, because of God’s immanence. God is wherever there is any “where”, and He is present “there” fully and completely. On the other hand, the circumference of the Divine sphere is “nowhere”, and this is because of God’s transcendence. You can never get to God’s edge, as it were, for it’s He who is always beyond. To shift to a different mathematical image, we could say that God is like an asymptote, always beyond wherever you may be on even the best theological curve.

Another medieval theologian, St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), used a different definition, a definition that had been given him (he tells us) by God Himself. According to Anselm, God is *that than which nothing greater can be thought*. If you’ve never heard this formulation before, I assure you that it’s well worth some pondering. (If you’re interested, an article of mine on the meaning of this cryptic phrase can be found on my website under publications; it’s called “Thinking the Unthinkable”.) Anselm’s definition functions, on one level at least, as a kind of trigonometrical formula. Consider anything great—he seems to be saying—any quality or power or property having a universally recognized value or goodness, and then project or extend that quality along its “axis” to a point beyond which you can no longer go mentally. Conceive it as complete, total, perfect—as having no limits or defects. Well, God is that being in whom all such conceivable values or goods exist beyond even the greatest degree you can possibly

think. He's that than which no more *powerful* a being may be conceived, which is to say He's omnipotent; He's that than which no more *intelligent* a being may be conceived, which is to say He's omniscient. And so on for all of His other incomparably infinite attributes.

I don't know about you, but after a while my brain can grow weary of all these various abstractions, and I find it useful when that happens to turn instead to more imaginative or dramatic efforts to speak of the Mystery. Theologians like Bonaventure and Anselm are very important to listen to, but C. S. Lewis is too, and to give you just a quick taste of what I mean by an "imaginative effort" to glimpse the mystery of God, I've included in the Reader a short piece by Lewis called "The Descent of the Gods"—a selection you may have found rather strange, taken as it is out of context. It's a chapter from one of the books in Lewis's space trilogy, a book called *That Hideous Strength*, and without trying to tell the whole story, I'll simply say that this chapter is Lewis's attempt to imagine what it might be like for a human being to encounter the various ranks of angels—which Lewis, following ancient Christian practice, associates with the gods [small "g"] of Greece and Rome. The point of the selection, for our purposes here, is simply this: however overwhelming and awesome the angels might be, even the greatest "god" among them—namely, Jove ("Glund-Oyarsa" in Lewis's language [41])—is less than nothing compared with God Himself.

That's the Mystery we're faced with this semester, or at least one slice of it.

**Lecture 5:**  
**The Transcendence of the Divine Immediacy**

In my last lecture, we finally got started (after several sessions of preliminaries) on our explorations of Christian doctrine *per se*. I began by calling your attention to an outline of systematic theology I'll be using throughout the semester. All theology, I said, comprises three fundamental teachings: the first concerns God, the second Man, and the third the God-Man, Jesus Christ. I went on to divide each of these major headings into two subsections, and the result was a six-fold scheme: 1) what God *is*, 2) what God *does*, 3) what Man *was*, 4) what Man *is*, 5) what Christ *does*, and 6) what Christ *is*. Systematic theology *is* systematic, I explained, precisely insofar as it's focused on the links or connections between these six points, and I anticipated our entire semester by saying that the work of the systematician consists in showing that the transformation of II.B. into II.A. is the effect of III.A. repeating I.B., which implies in turn the identity of III.B. and I.A. Man's salvation by Christ, in other words, depends on Christ's being God.

We then turned to the first point of the outline, I.A.—the question of who or what God is. According to Kallistos Ware, the most important thing for us to know, right from the very start, is that God is a *mystery*, and following Ware's lead I spent the rest of the lecture trying to make sense of this fundamental idea. Etymologically speaking, a mystery is something surpassing the powers of human perception and expression; it can't be registered by the eyes or taken in by any other of the physical senses, nor can it be described in language. Hence to say that God is a mystery is to say that He remains forever concealed or hidden even in the midst of His own revelation. As we've discussed before, the primary Revelation of God for Christians is the Person of Jesus Christ, but it's important to realize (given the fact of God's mystery) that *even in Christ, God did not fully appear nor become fully accessible*. John 1:18 makes this clear: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known." What it might mean for the Son to be in His Father's "bosom" or heart is not yet clear, for we've not yet looked at the doctrine of the Trinity. But whatever else it involves, it surely implies an extraordinary degree of intimacy. As the Divine Son, Christ is as close to the Father as you can possibly get; whatever He shows us of God will therefore surpass (for

the Christian) any other competing Revelation. Nevertheless, according to St John, even *after* the Son has “made God known” it remains the case that “no one has *ever* seen God”. This is a very important point to stress, especially for Christians who might otherwise be tempted to “humanize” God to an excessive degree. God certainly expresses Himself in a human way, and we see this above all in Jesus. But it would be a grave mistake to assume that the Divine Reality is somehow confined or constricted by that form of expression.

In any case, this elusive idea—the idea that God remains hidden even when He’s right in front of you—led us then to discuss what we called the two poles of God’s nature. God is on the one hand Absolute and therefore transcendent, while on the other hand He is Infinite and therefore immanent. The Divine Reality is at once beyond and within, outside and inside, above and below, there and here, then and now. It’s so far *beyond*, in fact, that one is tempted to say It doesn’t even “exist”, since existence (after all) is a category of human thought. On the other hand, It’s so deeply *within* everything that one is tempted (by contrast) to say that whatever exists “is” It, for It is infinitely diverse in Its omnipresence. Theologians have long struggled to come to terms with this paradox, and I gave you a couple of traditional examples: namely, St Bonaventure, who defines God as “an intelligible sphere the center of which is everywhere and the circumference nowhere”; and St Anselm, who describes Him as “that than which nothing greater can be thought”. But whatever formulation, the essential point is that God’s way of being is radically different from ours, different moreover from that of anything else. In fact—and I stressed this last time—He’s not really “*a* being” at all, not a *something* among other “things”, or an object among other objects. This is true of course physically, in that God is not like a solid or material object, but it’s even true in the ideational or spiritual order. Unlike the Pythagorean theorem, or the definition of beauty, or some other “idea”, and unlike an angel, or a human soul, or some other immaterial being, God is not an object (or even possible object) of consciousness: He’s not something, in other words, that you can look at mentally as one among a set of similar ideas or things. It would be better to say that He is “being itself” or “pure existence”. To use a Latin distinction favored by medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas, God is not *ens* (a

participle, that is, a noun formed from a verb) but *esse* (an infinitive, which is obviously “infinite”).

Taking yet another step into Mystery, it would actually be even *better* to say that God is *more* than pure existence—that He is “beyond” even Being. Here of course is where we must turn to what Ware calls the “apophatic approach” (14) to God. The word *apophatic* (as you’ll have gathered from your reading) has to do with denying or saying “no”; the Greek term *apophasis* refers to the “un-saying” of something, to the process of taking back your words. The opposite action—to continue with the Greek—is what we call a *kataphasis*, which is the act of affirming something. Any statement beginning with the words “This *is* ...” is kataphatic (sometimes spelled “cataphatic”), whereas any statement beginning with the words “This is *not* ...” is apophatic. In the Latin terms of Western Christendom, the former approach is what theologians call the *via affirmativa* or the “way of affirmation”, while the latter approach is the *via negativa* or the “way of negation”. According to the affirmative way of looking at things, God *is* the goodness of good things, the beauty of beautiful things, and the truth of true things. But according to the second perspective, His goodness is *not* what *we* mean by goodness, *nor* is His beauty what *we* mean by beauty, *nor* is His truth what *we* mean by truth. When speaking of the Divine Essence, the negative way or apophatic approach is a better method of guarding the full mystery of God. For according to Ware, “All that we affirm concerning God, however correct, falls far short of the living truth. If we say that He is good or just, we must at once add that His goodness or justice are not to be measured by our human standards. If we say that He exists, we must qualify this immediately by adding that He is not one existent object among many, that in His case the word ‘exist’ bears a unique significance” (14). And again, at the end of the chapter, Ware returns to this point: “Through the apophatic way we smash in pieces all the idols or mental images that we form of [God], for we know that all are unworthy of His surpassing greatness” (23).

As I hope you’ve discovered by now, it’s precisely this apophatic or negative way that is stressed in the traditional text that you were assigned for this section in the Reader, a text taken from one of the early Church fathers, St Dionysius the Areopagite. As it happens—and this of course is my reason for choosing him—there’s probably no author in the entire history of Christian thought who emphasized *apophasis* more, and it

therefore makes perfect sense that a selection from his works should accompany the first chapter of Ware. In the scholarly literature, this writer is often referred to as the “pseudo-Dionysius”, that is, the “false” Dionysius. Scholars claim that the writer who went by this name was probably a Syrian monk living around the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., and that he simply signed his work (as was not uncommon in those days) with the name of an honored figure from much earlier times—namely, a man who was converted by St Paul and who became the first bishop of Athens. We read in Acts 17:34 that “some men joined [Paul] and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite”. According to modern scholarship, the author of the work you’ve read probably lived at the later date just mentioned; otherwise, it is thought, he could not have had so fully developed a doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation. We needn’t concern ourselves with this dispute. I myself prefer to follow the Tradition in thinking that the author in question really was Paul’s convert, but either way the important thing to know is that his work had a profound influence on later theology, especially in the Christian East, but also in the West. St Thomas, for example, cites Dionysius more times than any other previous authority except for St Augustine.

According to Dionysius, we need to realize at the very outset of our theological studies that the ultimate Source of all things, which is also the final Goal of our search, is a “hidden super-essential Godhead” (26). In Dionysius’s Greek, super-essential Godhead is *hyperoúsios thearchía*. As some of you may know, the word for essence or being in Greek is *ousia*. God, however, is more than just “being”. He is instead “super-be’s” or “hyper-be’s”, and thus He must be described (says this author) as *hyperousios*. (*Hyper* in Greek means “over” or “above. We use the slang expression “hyper” when we want to call attention to someone’s “over”-the-top emotional state or off-the-wall behavior, but it seems God alone is *truly* “hyper”!) The other word in this key phrase is also important, *thearchia*. It’s a compound word composed of two roots: *theos*, which means “God” (whence, as we’ve noted before, our word “theology”), and *arché*, which means “beginning”, “origin”, or “principle”. Putting these together, we get something which means (literally) the Divine Beginning or the Divine Principle and which in Dionysius’s view refers to the ultimate Source or Origin of God Himself.

That's right: I said that God has an "origin". According to St Dionysius, we're obliged to say—however strange it may sound—that the Supreme Reality is beyond even what we usually call "God"; or to put it differently, we're obliged to concede that God is so "hyper" that in His essence He transcends even Himself. The translator has rendered this idea into English as "Godhead": there is not only a God; there is also, above this God, the *Godhead*—not the "head God", please note: that would be something quite different. As to the nature of this supreme Reality, Dionysius is quick to caution us, saying, "We must not dare to speak, or indeed to form any conception, of the hidden super-essential Godhead" (26). For this *thearchia* or Godhead is a "boundless Super-Essence" which "surpasses Essences" and a "Super-Intellectual Unity" which "surpasses Intelligences" (27). We find these same ideas, expressed even more explicitly, in another of this author's works, *The Mystical Theology*, which opens with a three-fold vocative addressing the Supreme Divinity: "O Super-essential One (*hyperousie*), O Super-good One (*hyperagathe*), O Super-divine One (*hypertheie*)."

But now wait just a minute! you may be thinking. If this ancient author is right that we have no business trying to speak about such a Divinity—if, to quote yet another phrase from the reading, the "Mystery of Godhead ... exceeds all Mind and Being" (27-28)—then what's the point of a course in Christian theology? Why not just pack up our bags and go home? For no matter what we do or say, aren't all our efforts going to be in vain? Well, no they're *not*, says St Dionysius, and the reason he's so optimistic is that the Godhead (again I'm quoting) "lovingly reveals Itself by illuminations corresponding to each creature's powers" (27). Though we must "gird ourselves for the task [of theology] with holiness and reverent fear of God" (26)—we've talked about the prerequisites of theological study before—we can nonetheless be confident of making progress toward a greater knowledge of God *if* we agree to adhere very closely to what the author calls "the occult Tradition of our inspired teachers" (29). Although the ultimate Reality is beyond all beyond-ness, It has condescended to impart to Its creatures certain glimpses, certain clues, certain hints, certain suggestions, certain pointers to Itself, in what the author calls "Its beneficent Emanations" (28), which—"the which" as the translator puts it!—have been transmitted to us by the Christian Tradition precisely.

As I hope you'll have gathered, Dionysius is drawing the same sort of distinction as the one we noted in *The Orthodox Way* (and among the early Church fathers) between essence and energies. In Itself, in Its own inward nature, God's essence must forever elude us. "The mystery of the Godhead," to repeat, "exceeds all Mind and Being." And yet, because that same essence pours Itself forth in an eternal emanation or overflow, we may nonetheless come into touch with It in Its radiant energies. For it "lovingly reveals Itself," in the words I just quoted, "by illuminations corresponding to each creature's powers." Moreover, though in Itself It is nameless, transcending all conception and discourse, nonetheless It makes Itself known to us, says Dionysius, under the guise of innumerable names and forms. What we have here once again is the paradox of the two poles of God, who is at once beyond and within. Section 5 of the reading (pp. 30-31) is especially telling in this respect. Because the Divine is beyond, we "can find no more fitting method to celebrate Its praises than to deny It every manner of Attribute". Although It is "the Cause of all things", yet It "Itself is nothing, because It super-essentially transcends them all [that is, all attributes, qualities, or predicates]". "And yet"—note this well—"since, as the Subsistence of goodness, It, by the very fact of Its existence, is the Cause of all things, in celebrating the bountiful Providence of the Supreme Godhead we must draw upon the whole creation. For it is both the central Force of all things, and also their final Purpose, and *is* Itself before them all, and they all subsist in It." Thus we arrive again at the two poles of transcendence and immanence.

Dionysius's chief concern in this chapter, when it comes to the energies of God or God in His immanence, is the names and titles of God that one finds in the Bible. A quick scan of the Scriptures reveals a multitude of positive descriptions of Divinity. To mention just a few of the many attributes that St Dionysius lists, God is referred to as good, fair, wise, beloved, and holy; as a sun, star, fire, cloud, and rock; and as having eyes, ears, arms, and feet. Dionysius explains to us readers that while none of these terms can be taken literally, for the apophatic reasons I've been stressing, they may serve nonetheless (when interpreted on a symbolic or spiritual level) as the means of beholding what he calls "the blindingly blissful impulses of [God's] dazzling rays" (29). (The next time you're sitting on a park bench reading the Bible, and someone comes along and asks you what you're doing, say that you're beholding the blindingly blissful impulses of God's

dazzling rays!) Anyway, the idea here is that even though God isn't *really* a rock, for example (though Ps. 18:2 says He is), nevertheless there is something about the firmness or stability of rocks that can serve to point us beyond these merely geological data toward the archetypal firmness and stability of That Which Never Changes, that is, the Eternal, which (of course) is precisely what God Himself "is". Similarly, even though God doesn't really have "eyes" (though Prov. 15:3 says He has)—or not at least eyes as we know them—there's something about how our eyes work, the way in which they provide us with an instantaneous grasp of the visible world, that can serve to point us beyond these merely ophthalmological data toward the archetypal vision of That Which Sees All, that is, the Omniscient, which again is what God Himself "is".

Now I realize Dionysius doesn't teach this explicitly in what you've read, but he would actually take a further step. He would say that the energies of God, the "dazzling rays" of Divinity, have been revealed for man's benefit, not only in the words of the Bible, but also in the visual and other symbols of the wider Tradition. Notice that God has made use of both "the Scriptures and the Hierarchical Traditions" as He "enwrappeth spiritual truths in terms drawn from the world of sense, and super-essential truths in terms drawn from Being, clothing with shapes and forms things which are shapeless and formless, and by a variety of separable symbols, fashioning manifold attributes of the imageless and supernatural Simplicity" (29). What does this author mean by a "variety of separable symbols"? You'll recall that in my introductory lectures I stressed several times that the Revelation of God in the Person of Christ has been extended or projected through time, not only by the Bible, and not only by such other written media as creeds and the proclamations of councils, but also by visual symbols, icons, sacraments, relics, ritual gestures, and other non-verbal means. It's these and other such modes of spiritual expression Dionysius has in mind when he speaks about God clothing His shapelessness in shapes and His formlessness in forms. He's thinking, in part at least, of the huge panoply of symbols that the Tradition has offered since ancient times for use in Christian worship. For he knows that these symbols—precisely because they're *not* verbal, but rather woven of colored and textured matter, just like the body of the Incarnate Christ—can often prove even more useful than words in transmitting glimpses and hints of God's unspeakable glory.

I've spent considerable time in my last lecture, and again here today, underscoring the weirdness and awesomeness of God. But it would be a huge mistake for us to go away thinking that the Divine strangeness is merely a matter of distance and that God is therefore best approached by means of abstraction. On the contrary, if the Christian Tradition is right, the fact that God is so odd comes at least in part from His being so immediate, so concretely present, so much "here" that we fail to notice Him. It's a case of not being able to see what's right under our noses. Here of course I'm thinking of the pole of immanence, but with this further twist, that *the immanence is in fact transcendent*. It's been important for us to distinguish between these two poles, but having done so several times and from a variety of points of view, it's just as important—even more important—to add that each dimension or pole is actually inside the other. Transcendence and immanence, above and below, beyond and within: these are not separate things. For in truth, the Divine immanence *is* transcendent, and the transcendence *is* immanent. God exceeds and surpasses us precisely because He's so close, and hence—in the final analysis—*the greatest mystery of all is the very fact that there is a mystery*.

I realize that this will probably be the hardest, and most paradoxical, thing I've said yet, and we'll need to allow plenty of time for probing this claim further in class. For the moment, however, before I conclude this lecture, I want to circle back and stress once again what I was saying above about the importance of non-verbal symbols. As I've mentioned before, I hope to introduce you to several examples of traditional symbols as the semester unfolds, and my reason for doing that is to capitalize on this Dionysian claim that the Godhead has clothed Itself in shapes and forms—and to help you begin seeing, perhaps even lightly touching or tasting, *the transcendence of the Divine immediacy*. Some of these symbols and images go back as far as the mid-first century, when the New Testament was still being composed and when the earliest creeds were yet to be formulated—to a point, in other words, before a *written* Christian Tradition was ever really an issue. They are thus among the very first manifestations of the Christian "mystery". Like the Incarnation, of which they are the concrete prolongations, they're a testimony to the fact that the fullest Revelation of God for the Christian takes the form of genuine flesh: it's tangible and substantial, and its very solidity tells us something about God which no words can convey but which we can sometimes just dimly glimpse

shimmering through the color of an icon, something hinted at, ever so faintly, in the smell of incense or in the haunting tones of ancient liturgical chant.

From time to time, therefore—if and when there *is* time, depending on our other discussions—my plan is to look at a few of these symbols with you, offering some background to help us come to terms with their traditional meanings. You need to realize, of course, that in trying to describe their meaning in words, we're going to end up doing a certain amount of violence to their real significance. The synthetic quality of a symbol is such that no verbal formulation will ever mean quite the same thing. But maybe I can say just enough in class to get you interested in pursuing a less cerebral and more intuitive mode of exploration on your own.

**Lecture 6:**  
**The Trinity as Inspired Deduction**

As you know, we're in the midst of discussing the first point of our outline of systematic theology, which concerns the question of God's "isness" or nature. We're trying to figure out what exactly Christians mean by "God". Summing up our answer so far we could simply say that God is a "mystery", by which one means (among other things) that God is a Reality embracing two poles or dimensions. He's at once beyond and within everything else that exists. He's not just *a* being, or even being-itself. He's rather Beyond-even-Being, a "super-essential Godhead", in the phrase of St Dionysius the Areopagite. And yet—all theology in a sense can be found in these two words: "and yet"!—*and yet*, in His very beyondness, supereminence, and transcendence, God remains paradoxically closer than your pulse. For the mystery of God is in fact as immediate as the greenness of green, or the wetness of water, or the sweetness of chocolate. This, the Christian would say, is precisely why His fullest Revelation takes the form of real flesh, and it's why the Tradition transmits what God is, not only in the words of the Bible, but with icons and symbols and sacraments. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9)

I pointed out in my first lecture on the first chapter of Ware that this idea of mystery, and this whole view of God as having two "poles", is by no means unique to Christianity. I mentioned specifically that both Judaism and Islam, the two other western or Abrahamic traditions, completely agree about this. In fact *all* the world's major religions would concur on this point. They would all say that the Supreme or Ultimate Reality is simultaneously absolute and infinite, eluding all human categories. This, as noted in my last presentation in class, is what the Buddhist means when he describes the Highest Truth as *Nirvana* or Emptiness; this is what the Hindu has in mind when he says that the Supreme Principle, called *Brahman*, is *Nirguna* (that is, indescribable); and this is what the Taoist intends to express when he teaches, in the opening words of the *Tao Te Ching*, that "the *tao* that can be told is not the eternal *Tao*. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name". And so, up to this point in the course, we've not really said anything that's uniquely or distinctively Christian.

It's only in turning to the doctrine of the Trinity that one encounters a teaching that sets the Christian religion apart. You'll recall that the very first day of class, I pointed to the Trinity as one of the two central or defining beliefs of Christianity, the other being the Incarnation. In no other religious tradition do we find the idea that the Divine is inwardly differentiated into three distinct Persons. As you may know if you've taken a course in world religions, there's an *approximate* parallel in Hinduism in the *Trimurti*, or "triple manifestation", of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—the Creator God, the Preserver God, and the Destroyer or Transformer God. In this case, however, the differentiation is outward, as it were: a single supreme Reality, *Brahman*, expresses Itself at a lower level of Being in the form of these three different Gods. But in Christianity the differentiation begins from within the Supreme Reality, and the Ultimate Source of all things is Itself a "member" of the Trinity. Whatever the similarities with Hinduism, Trinitarian doctrine has no parallel whatsoever in the West. Both Jews and Muslims completely reject such a teaching, claiming that it's opposed to a truly rigorous monotheism. In Judaism, the Old Testament text of Deuteronomy 6:4 (we refer to this verse as the *Shema* after the first word in Hebrew) is absolutely decisive: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is *one*." If God is one, then it's obvious to the Jew that He can't also be three. As for Islam, the Qur'an explicitly repudiates the doctrine of the Trinity as a blasphemous error. Speaking directly to Christians, the Qur'an says, "Do not exaggerate in your religion, nor utter anything concerning Allah [this is the Arabic word for God] save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a *messenger* of Allah.... So believe in Allah and His messengers and do not say 'Three'—Cease! (It is) better for you!—Allah is only One God" (*Surah* 4:171).

In striking contrast to these theological perspectives, Christianity teaches (to borrow Ware's words in Chapter 2) that "there is in God genuine diversity as well as true unity. The Christian God is not just a unit but a union, not just unity but community" (27). We need to be very careful, however, in how we express and explain this community, for Christianity is still a *monotheistic*, not a *polytheistic*, religion. Like Jews and Muslims, Christians believe in only one Divinity, not in a plurality of many different gods. And yet—there I go again with another "and yet"!—they believe at the same time that this single Divinity is internally distinguished into three different Persons, whom

they call the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Quoting again from Ware, “Although Father, Son, and Spirit are one single God, yet each of them is from all eternity a person, a distinct centre of conscious selfhood. God the Trinity is thus to be described as ‘three persons in one essence’” (30).

Ware calls our attention to the terminology used in the Nicene Creed, an early statement of faith promulgated in the year 381 A.D. by the second of the Ecumenical Councils, a document we’ll be looking at much more carefully later when we talk about those councils and their Christological pronouncements. For now, I suggest you take a look instead at another early creed of the Church, one that paints perhaps an even clearer picture of the Christian view of the Trinity. What I have in mind is an ancient statement of faith referred to sometimes as the “Athanasian Creed”—so labeled after St Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296 - 373), its purported (though doubtful) author. It’s also known as the *Quicumque Vult* after the first two words of its Latin text (meaning “whosoever wishes or wills”). I’ve included this important document, along with a number of other creeds we’ll be considering later, in the Appendix to the Reader (see pp. 222-24). Do please read it through, and we’ll discuss it in class.

At the risk of confusing you, I’d better add a parenthesis here. As it turns out, there’s one phrase in this statement of faith that remains to this day in dispute among Christians. Historically, the “Athanasian” way of describing the Trinity has been favored mainly in the West, among Catholics primarily, but also by Anglicans and Lutherans. From the Orthodox point of view, however, there’s a problem with the way it envisions the relationship among the three Divine Persons. Orthodoxy does *not* believe—in the words of the *Quicumque Vult*—that “the Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son” (223). Orthodox Christians say on the contrary that the Spirit is “of the Father” *alone*, and *not* also “of the Son”. This distinction has to do with a long-debated theological question as to whether the third Person of the Trinity is the result of a “single or a double procession”. I’ll come back to this somewhat recondite issue in a later lecture. For now, setting this dispute and its subtleties aside, we can certainly say that *all* Christians—Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox—accept the basic idea expressed in this creed: namely, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all equally Divine, all of

them sharing in all the powers and privileges of Deity, but without their plurality in any way compromising the unity or oneness of God Himself.

However one formulates the relationship among the Divine Persons, it's only natural for the budding systematic theologian to wonder where the doctrine of the Trinity comes from, and why anyone would have accepted so strange a notion in the first place. As Ware admits (28), it would be much easier (on this point at least) to be a Jew or a Muslim—easier to believe, in other words, that God is just one, with no complications and no complexities. So, what are the grounds, what are the Christian reasons, for believing that the Supreme Reality is a Trinity?

As always, the theologian is going to answer this question by means of Revelation, and as always he's going to focus his attention on the primary Revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. St Thomas Aquinas, for example, is very explicit in saying that while the existence of God can be demonstrated by reason alone, reason would never on its own have come to know the Trinitarian “structure” of that God. For this, special or supernatural revelation was required. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to suppose that the doctrine of the Trinity was itself *directly* revealed. On the contrary, the doctrine is what we might call an “inspired deduction”, a deduction based upon the primary Revelation of God in Christ. Given the “data” presented by Christ in both His doing and being—I'm referring to points III.A. and III.B of our outline—we're obliged to conclude, says the Christian Tradition, that the *one* God must in some sense be *more* than just one. (I'll talk a bit more about the relevant “data” below.) Here's a classic example of the way in which systematics brings the various doctrines together. We're still working with I.A. of our outline, trying to understand the eternal nature of God, something that was already true of the Divine Reality long “before” Jesus of Nazareth was born. But since Jesus is believed to be none other than the *incarnation* of that Divine Reality, true God in the flesh, it's essential that we link I.A. to both III.A. and III. B., for what one sees in Christ are certain clues as to what God must have *always* been like, whether men had yet come to know it or not.

Philosophers sometimes distinguish between two orders of relationship: *ratio essendi* and *ratio cognoscendi*. The first of these Latin phrases means the “order of being”, and the second the “order of knowing”. The first “order” pertains to the sequence

in which things come to exist, while the second is related to the order in which we first come to know about those things. In the order of *being*, the Trinity obviously comes before the Incarnation, for according to Christianity, Divinity existed (or rather “super-existed”!) in three distinct Persons “before” the very foundation of time, whereas the first Christmas occurred within time, a little over 2000 years ago. But in the order of *knowing*, the Incarnation came before the doctrine of the Trinity, for it was only in response to the Revelation of God in the Person of Jesus that people first began to draw the conclusion, based upon their encounters with Christ and their growing wonder at His miraculous power, that He *too* must be God, and thus to think that the Divine must comprise, and being Divine must have *always* comprised, more than a single Person.

Now you may be puzzled, I realize, as to why I use the term “conclusion” here, and why I’ve called the doctrine of the Trinity an “inspired deduction”. I use these words to emphasize the fact that Christian belief in the Trinity originated as an *interpretation* of data. It was not itself a datum or “given”. The Divine Reality didn’t call down from the sky, “Now hear this, ladies and gentlemen. Though I am essentially one, I also exist as three Persons. Write that down!” It sometimes comes as a surprise to students when they hear me say this, but the doctrine of the Trinity is actually nowhere to be found in the Bible. There are numerous suggestions and hints, of course, and given the teaching of the later Ecumenical Councils, we come to realize in retrospect that they were so many clues. One such indication is provided at Jesus’s baptism: the Father’s voice is heard, calling Jesus the “beloved Son”, and the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove (see Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23). But you’ll search the Scriptures in vain for an explicit, unambiguous formulation of Trinitarian doctrine *per se*.

I don’t wish to go into this point in detail right now, but for those who might like to begin verifying my claim, I can point you to a couple of representative texts: 2 Corinthians 13:14 and 1 Peter 1:2. In both of these passages, all three Persons of the Trinity are certainly mentioned—the Father, Christ, and the Spirit. And it’s certainly the case that in each of these verses the harmony or unity of these Persons’ actions is stressed. These texts confirm, in other words, what Ware calls the “Triadic patterns in salvation history” (35), as does the story of Jesus’s baptism. Nevertheless it’s possible to make good sense of each passage without supposing that the three terms refer to “one

God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity” (as the Athanasian Creed puts it), and hence without thinking that they refer to eternally distinct though co-equal Persons of a single Essence. In the entire New Testament, only Matthew 28:19 might seem to be an exception to this rule: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”. The singular number of the noun *name* in this passage (rather than the plural “names”) is certainly suggestive of unity. If—you might reason—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all have the same “name”, then they must all be the same *thing*, one single God. But this is a weak argument at best. After all, different people can share the same name, but this doesn’t mean that all the Freds and all the Janes are of a single eternal essence. Moreover, in the Bible the word “name” connotes primarily authority; we see this meaning as well outside the Scriptures in the familiar expression, “Stop in the name of the law!” In other words, the name of Matthew 28:19 is not a *proper* name, and it would therefore be perfectly permissible to take this verse as meaning only that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all operate under or with one and the same aegis or authority, without thereby supposing that they’re all of an identical ontological substance.

So no, the doctrine of the Trinity, as I’ve sketched it so far, was not in fact something just lying around in the Bible for the taking, not something obvious to be gleaned from the Scriptures. On the contrary, the early Christians spent over three hundred years coming to a full grasp of this doctrine, and during those years there were numerous disputes and disagreements. If you think about it, this was almost inevitable. Jesus was a Jew, His disciples were Jews, and most of the earliest Christian converts were Jews. As I’ve noted already, whatever else Jews might believe, they’re absolutely convinced that God is one and not many, a unity and not a diversity. It was therefore by no means an easy matter for the first Christians to accept some new perspective, some new way of looking at God, a way that seemed to threaten so fundamental an existing conviction. Nevertheless—and here’s the crucial point for our purposes—Jews though they were, there was something about Jesus that could not be ignored, something about His way of being and acting, which finally compelled them to “conclude” that He fully shared in Divinity, and thus that there must be more to the mystery of God than they’d ever supposed.

Most of you probably have a fairly clear overall picture of Christ's earthly life as it's described in the Gospels, and you're probably aware—at least in general terms—of what I've been calling the data. We'll have occasion to look at those data much more closely later when we focus on the doctrine of the God-Man. When I talk about the "Jesus data", what I have in mind is everything from the various names and titles for Christ (the Word, the Son of God, the Son of Man, I AM, *etc.*) to His miraculous healings (Matt. 8:1-4; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 7:2-10; John 9:1-12; *passim*); from His transfiguration on Tabor (Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36) to His crucifixion on Golgotha (Matt. 27:33; Mark 15:22; Luke 23:33; John 19:17); from His raising of Jarius's daughter (Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43) and Lazarus (John 11:1-44) to His own rising from the dead (Matt. 28:9-10; Mark 16:5-6; Luke 24:36-43; John 20). Unlike the modernist Biblical scholar, early Christians took all these passages very seriously. Their understanding of the Scriptures was not confined (like the inerrantist's) to the merely literal meaning of the texts, but at the same time they believed that all these wonders were true, that the events thus described had really taken place. And if they were systematic theologians, they were obliged to bring their minds to bear on these miraculous matters and to begin accounting for the overall Gospel picture of Jesus in some sort of logical way so as to explain how things could have happened as they did.

To make a long story short for the moment, faced with Christ's Person and deeds, the theologians of the early Church found that they could explain these various data only by concluding that *whatever* He was, Jesus was not just a regular guy. In fact, they realized, He was not even just a perfect or sinless human being, nor even just the highest, most angelic of creatures clothed in a human body. No, they decided instead that, in order to have been able to act and speak as He did, He must Himself be Divine.

There's a passage in the synoptic gospels—these, as you'll remember, are the first three books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, and Luke)—where Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (see Matt. 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-29, and Luke 9:18-21). As I mentioned in Lecture 2, when we were talking about the question of Biblical inerrancy, the accounts differ significantly from gospel to gospel. But what they all have in common is the basic response of St Peter, the first of the disciples to answer Jesus's question. Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt.

16:16). The word “Christ”, as you may know, is the English form of *Christos*, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew *Messiah*, meaning “the anointed one”. The Jews had long looked forward to the coming of a promised Messiah, who, according to the Old Testament prophets, was to be a duly anointed (that is, coronated) king, and who would be sent by God to deliver His people from bondage. But *no* Jew—this is very important—expected that this Messiah would be more than a man. It was assumed he would be a purely human figure like Moses, who would lead the people in obedience to God’s command. Nor—and this is also crucial to the issue at hand—would any Jew have supposed that the phrase “son of God” necessarily had any special, Divine significance. Peter’s statement in this particular passage, taken on its own, would by no means have automatically meant that Jesus was more than a man. We have no way of knowing exactly what St Peter himself may have thought he was saying on this occasion, or what he believed to be the full implications of his words, but the point is that it wouldn’t have been unnatural or impossible for a pious Jew to refer to *any* human being, especially any fellow Jew, as a son or a daughter of God. All the people of Israel were in some sense God’s children. On the other hand, to take the further step of suggesting that a human being could fully share in God’s deity: this would have been unthinkable.

But here precisely is where theologians of the early Church *did* take a step further, further certainly than anything we find explicitly stated in Peter’s response in the Bible. Gradually, during the course of debates lasting into the fourth century, they reached the conclusion that whatever Peter himself may have meant by this statement, and whatever pious Jews of his time may have expected, Jesus of Nazareth could not have worked the deeds or spoken the words that He did if He were merely a Messiah in the conventional or anticipated sense, nor could He have said or done what He did if He were merely a generic “son of God”. On the contrary, the data are such that this particular *son of God* must at the same time have been *God the Son*. In His very essence, He must be intrinsically and eternally Divine. And this, as Ware notes, is precisely what we find expressed in the Nicene Creed, where Christ is declared to be “‘true God from true God’, ‘one in essence’ or ‘consubstantial’ (*homoousios*) with God the Father” (*The Orthodox Way*, 29).

Now I know this can be a little confusing, especially if you're hearing these ideas for the first time. I've discovered over the years that when many people hear the word "Son" in a Christian theological context, they automatically assume we're talking about the Incarnation. They have a mental picture of God the Father sitting on a throne in the Heavens, and they picture His Son in a strictly terrestrial form—as the baby Jesus, or as a young boy in the temple, or as an adult man working miracles. The whole issue is doubly complicated by the fact (which, of course, is what I've been stressing here) that if it *weren't* for His terrestrial or earthly manifestation, Christians would never have "concluded" that there was such a thing as the Divine Son in the first place, understood as a distinct Person of God—that such a Son actually "pre-exists" His embodiment as Jesus Christ and is from all eternity a distinct member of the Trinity. (Here again, you see, is where the distinction between a *ratio essendi* and a *ratio cognoscendi* comes in.) C. S. Lewis is well aware of this complication and potential confusion, which is why, in the chapter called "Making and Begetting" in the Reader, he issues this very timely and important warning: "One of the creeds [he's also referring to the Nicene Creed] says that Christ is the Son of God, 'begotten not created'; and it adds 'begotten by His Father before all worlds'. Will you please get it quite clear," Lewis cautions, "that this has nothing to do with the fact that when Christ was born on earth as a man, that man was the son of a virgin? We are not now thinking about the Virgin Birth. We are thinking of something that happened before Nature was created at all, before time began" (56).

Before time began, deep within the very heart of the Mystery, there was always a Son of God, distinct from both God the Father and the Holy Spirit. From all eternity there has always been a Reality comprising Three-Persons-in-One. This, in brief, is the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

A quick addendum before I conclude: I realize you may be asking yourselves, "Alright, but what about the Holy Spirit?" So far all we've shown is that Christians should be *bi*-nitarians, not *tri*-nitarians. About the only thing Ware does in the present chapter in addressing this question is to point out that in "developing this teaching, the Greek Fathers of the later fourth century said the same about the Holy Spirit: he is likewise truly God, 'one in essence' with the Father and the Son" (29-30). But why? Why

complicate things even further? Like Ware, I'm going to leave that issue unresolved for the moment. When we turn to the fifth chapter of *The Orthodox Way* and to a full-blown discussion of the Holy Spirit, we'll have a chance to examine in much more rewarding detail some of the reasons theologians give for believing that the Spirit too is a distinct Person of God. Stay tuned.

## Lecture 7:

### *Filioque, Salvation, and the Number 3*

Last time we began a discussion of the Divine as Trinity. Having established the fact that the Christian stress on God's "mystery" has parallels in all the major religions, we went on to consider what makes the Christian view distinctive, what sets it apart from other ways of looking at the Supreme Reality. And we discovered that its uniqueness consists, at least in part, in the belief that the Divine exists in the form of three different Persons. In the words of the Athanasian Creed, Christians "worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance" (Reader, 222). They believe on the one hand that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are *not* simply three names for the same thing. That would be confounding or confusing the Persons. On the contrary, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are (in Ware's words) "distinct centers of conscious selfhood" (30), who are more (and not less) different from each other than *we* are from each other. I am not you, and you are not I. We are different persons, each with his own "self" or subjectivity. So also in the case of the Trinity. The Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Father, nor is either the Holy Spirit. Each is a unique Person, *more* unique than any human person. On the other hand we're *not* to suppose that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are therefore three separate deities. That would be what the Athanasian Creed calls "dividing the Substance", and the result would be a form of polytheism. Christians believe on the contrary that there is but a single, indivisible, monotheistic Reality, all of which is in each Person.

Having established these basic points, we then turned to the question of where this doctrine first came from, and I explained that historically speaking it originated in the early Church as a way of accounting for the Person of Christ. Although the doctrine cannot be explicitly found in the Bible, it developed as an "inspired deduction" based upon traditional, including Biblical, data concerning Jesus. Christian theologians came to the conclusion that Christ wasn't simply a generic *son of God* (as St Peter's confession might have implied), but rather that He is *God the Son*—the incarnate manifestation of an eternal dimension of God. And given the deity of this Son—given that the Supreme Reality was acknowledged to have a kind of internal complexity—it was a relatively

small step for theologians to proclaim that the Holy Spirit is also Divine and that It too has the status of Divine Person: a *Third* Person of the Trinity. As Ware will explain more thoroughly later when we come to his chapter on the Holy Spirit, “The Spirit [too] is a *person*. He is not just a ‘divine blast’ (as once I heard someone describe Him), not just an insentient force, but one of the three eternal persons of the Trinity; and so, for all his seeming elusiveness, we can and do enter into a personal ‘I-Thou’ relationship with Him” (91). More on that subject that later.

Finally, we spent some time in our last class session comparing the doctrine of the Trinity with some other ancient theological theories. I contrasted Trinitarian doctrine with two forms of “monarchianism”: dynamic and modalistic. According to dynamic monarchianism (also called adoptionism), only the Father is truly Divine, whereas the Spirit is simply a force (a “divine blast” in Ware’s terms) that empowered or energized the man Jesus of Nazareth. According to modalistic monarchianism (also called Sabellianism, or simply modalism), the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three “modes” or “disguises” or “roles” in which one, single Person of God expresses Himself at successive stages of history. Summing up we could say—in the words, once again, of the Athanasian Creed—that the dynamic monarchians *divide the substance* of God, for they treat Christ and the Father and the Spirit as if they were separate kinds of beings; whereas the modalistic monarchians *confound the Persons* of God, for they treat Christ and the Father and the Spirit as if they were simply different labels or names for a monolithic singularity. Here Ware’s formulation may be usefully repeated: “The Christian God is not just a *unit*”—this is what both kinds of monarchians assumed—“but a *union*” (27). For those of you who’ve studied some Greek, Ware is borrowing a distinction first made by St Gregory of Nazianzus (also known as “the Theologian” [329-89]). God, said Gregory, is not a *hen*—that’s the Greek word for “one”, not a female chicken!—but a *henosis*: not an arithmetical *unit*, but a *union* or *communion* of distinctive members.

In order to underscore these ideas, I attempted to picture these divergent points of view. But now in this lecture I need to complicate matters somewhat and tell you that the diagram of the Holy Trinity, of “orthodox Trinitarianism”, which we examined last time, is not as precise as it should be. For in picturing the three Persons as if they were three branches or spurs or spokes coming out from a separate center or hub, it might have

seemed to you as though I were suggesting that there is some “G” or independent Divinity over and above or in addition to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. But in fact this is *not* the teaching of the Christian Tradition. The Christian Divinity is *not* a quaternity—not the sum total of three spokes and one hub—but a trinity, and there’s no *separate* Divinity apart from Its Persons. Here, as I mentioned last time, is an important difference between the Christian understanding of God and the Hindu understanding of *Brahman*, for *Brahman* is understood by Hindus to be something “higher” and “other” than the three “persons” of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

In fact, in the Orthodox perspective, what we should really be saying is that *there is no Divinity apart from the Father*, for it’s God the Father who is Himself alone the principle of unity in God. Indeed the Father *is* the “one true God” in the teaching of certain Orthodox theologians, and it’s He who in turn shares His intrinsic Divinity with the Son and the Spirit. Indeed for the Orthodox it’s actually somewhat misleading to talk about a “triune” God, an expression one often hears in western churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. From the Orthodox point of view, to use this adjective—to say that God is *triune*—is to imply that “God” is a generic term, the full meaning of which is distributed as it were among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and this is to risk a return (they contend) to the heresy of modalistic monarchianism. It’s also to risk confusing and alienating prospective Christian believers, for the Western (that is, Roman Catholic and Protestant) formulation of the Trinity sometimes makes it sound as though God were a mathematical absurdity, a being that is at once and in the same respect both one and three. What Orthodox theologians prefer to say, therefore, is that there is one—and only one—God as such, that this God is none other than God the Father, and that it’s from this Father that the Divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit is derived. Thus Ware can write: “The first person of the Trinity, God the Father, is the ‘fountain’ of the Godhead, the source, cause or principle of origin for the other two persons” (32). Or in the words again of St Gregory the Theologian, whom Ware quotes, “The union *is* the Father, from whom and to whom the order of the persons runs its course” (32).

Technically, therefore, what we ought to be saying is this: whereas all three Persons of the Trinity are completely *Divine*, sharing in everything that distinguishes God from His creatures, only the Father is *God* as such. Having made this subtle distinction,

however, I have to admit that many Orthodox themselves often speak less precisely than perhaps they should. Ware certainly does on occasion, as (for example) when he describes the Spirit as *God within* us, the Son as *God with* us, and the Father as *God above* or *beyond* us (33). But again, to be as careful as possible, what we really ought to be saying is that the one true God of the Christian religion is not the Trinity “taken as a whole”, as it were, but the Person of the Father—although this way of speaking should in *no* way be understood as diminishing, compromising, or negating the genuine Divinity of the Son and the Spirit.

Now for yet another complexity! I realize that all these distinctions are hard to digest, particularly if you’re not used to philosophical subtleties, but in the interest of thoroughness and accuracy, I must introduce you to just one more idea before our understanding of the Trinity can be complete. Ware mentions it in the book, in a section of the chapter called “Personal Characteristics”, when he’s discussing what differentiates the Father from the Son and the Spirit. It has to do with the *order of relationship* among the three Persons, which is the basis for a longstanding dispute between the Christian East and the West (and which I very briefly touched on last time). Historically this dispute is extremely important, for it was responsible in part for the Great Schism of 1054 A.D., when the Orthodox and Roman Catholics first officially split with each other. Please understand, however: the disputed issue is *not* the Trinity *per se*. There’s complete consensus among all traditional Christians (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all Divine. All three sectors of Christendom are agreed that the two monarchianisms are mistaken theories, and that the Supreme Reality exists eternally in the form of three distinct Persons.

Where disagreement comes in is over the relationship of the Spirit to the Father and Son. According to Eastern Christian theology, the Father is the sole source of both the Son and the Spirit: the Son is “begotten” by the Father *alone*, while the Holy Spirit “proceeds” from the Father *alone*. Moreover, these two relationships are parallel; in other words, neither has any logical (and certainly no chronological) precedence over the other. On the other hand, according to the Western Church, although the Father is the sole Source of the Son, the Holy Spirit (by contrast) proceeds from *both* the Father *and* the Son. The phrase “and the Son” is expressed in Latin by the single word *filioque*, a word

that was added in the late sixth century to the Latin text of the Nicene Creed. As the Western theologian sees it, the Divine “begetting” of the Son is logically prior to the “procession” of the Spirit. From the Eastern point of view, however, this is to confuse the *eternal* relationship between the Spirit and the Father with the *historical* or *temporal* relationship between the Spirit and the Son. It’s certainly true, admit the Orthodox, that the *incarnate* Son of God—Jesus Christ—“sent” or “delegated” the Holy Spirit at the end of His earthly life (see John 20:22), and it’s therefore true that the Spirit “proceeds” from the Son in a *historical* sense. But this procession is not *eternal*: in other words, it doesn’t take place beyond time and within the very heart of God. Here the Orthodox cite a text in the Gospel of John as Biblical proof of their position. Jesus says, “When the Comforter comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness to me” (John 15:26). Notice that while Jesus is responsible for the “sending” of the Spirit, the “procession” of the Spirit is solely from the Father. Ware briefly alludes to this whole question in Chapter 2 of our book, using the term *filioque* and referring to the doctrine of the “double procession” (32). If you’d like to see precisely where the word was added to the Western emendation of the Creed, I’ve noted the spot in the Appendix to the Reader (221).

Now I realize this whole dispute may seem a lot of useless hairsplitting—like those infamous medieval debates over the question: “How many angels can dance on the head of pin?” (Actually this question, so often cited in order to cast aspersions on Scholastic logic, served a very important purpose, which I’m happy to explain in class if anyone is interested.) After all, to put things in perspective, what we’re talking about when we discuss the question of the Spirit’s “procession” is something that was “going on”—to use the uselessness of such language—within the Divine Mystery outside of time and from all eternity, and it’s tempting to throw your hands up and say, *who knows* and *who cares*?! Even supposing we could grasp such a seemingly sophisticated point, what difference does it make whether the Spirit originated from the Father alone or from the Father and the Son acting together? What a crazy thing for the two largest churches in the world to have split over! I’m sure I won’t be able to convince all of you, but (believe it or not) how you look at this issue has important implications for your wider view of theology as a whole, and in particular for your understanding of salvation. As I’ve

stressed several times, and shall continue to stress, systematic theology approaches doctrines as vital links in a living organism: what you say about any one of those doctrines is bound to have consequences for your interpretation of the others.

I'll talk much more about this later in the semester, but very briefly for now: what you believe about the procession of the Holy Spirit—whether it's "single" or "double"—turns out to be closely linked to the question of whether it's possible for a human being to be deified, that is, to come to share in God's very nature. Can a man or woman be taken as it were "into" the ultimate Mystery so as to become completely transformed, living henceforth in an uncreated and eternal modality?

If you're a Western Christian, a Catholic or Protestant, who accepts the term *filioque* and thus the doctrine of the double procession, you tend to see the Spirit as mainly a bridge between the Father and the Son. According to St Augustine, for example—whose work on the Trinity we'll be discussing below—the Father may be understood as the Divine Lover, the Son as the Beloved, and the Spirit as the Love They share. Streaming forth like light from the other two Persons, the Spirit is the convergence as it were of two distinct beams. Or, to shift metaphors, It's the "glue" that holds all the Divine Persons together. (Needless to say, I mean none of this literally; as always, human language is at best an approximation.) This being so, Western Christians tend to think of Divinity as more or less "turned in" on Itself (again an approximation), and they therefore assume that a human being's relation with that Divinity can never be more than one of juxtaposition or proximity. Even in Heaven, when we're granted what the Roman Catholic tradition calls the *visio beatifica*, or "beatific vision", and are permitted to gaze directly on God, we'll remain "outsiders".

By contrast, if you're Orthodox, you tend to place greater stress on the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit, on Its having its own—one mustn't say "independence" exactly, for none of the Persons is independent of the others, but its own particularity or distinctiveness, its own special role or agency in the world and in the life of man: a role parallel and complementary to that of the Son, but at the same time different from it. Like the Son, you believe, the Holy Spirit comes forth directly from God the Father, who's the

Source of *both* the Son and the Spirit, their cause or point of origin.<sup>1</sup> Given this basic “model” of the Trinity, traditional Christians of the East tend to think of the Spirit less as the inward “glue” of the Trinity—less as a bond between the Father and the Son—and more as the radiant and life-giving presence of God in the world, as the One in and through whom the incarnate presence of the Son is prolonged after His Ascension and His return to the Father in Heaven. As the Orthodox see it, the Spirit is like the Son in that It helps to make Divinity available or accessible to man, “externalizing” all that God is in order that His creatures might be drawn into a full participation in His own Reality. And it’s because of their stress on this Divine availability or accessibility, manifest not only in the *past* in the Person of the Incarnate Christ but also in the *present* in the Person of the Holy Spirit, that the Orthodox believe it’s possible for a human being, even someone who’s still alive and still walking the earth in our midst, to come to share in the inward life of God. Whereas the traditional Western Christian typically looks forward to *intimacy* or *closeness* to God in the future, the Orthodox typically seeks a *penetration* of God in the present, in the here and now, by means of what is sometimes called, in Orthodox sources, the “acquisition of the Holy Spirit”.

I realize, as I said before, that these few remarks probably won’t have proved very much, and you may still be thinking that this *filioque* business is all rather silly. But perhaps, if nothing else, I’ll have sown some seeds for later in the semester when we discuss different Christian views of salvation.

For the moment, though, let me shift direction and approach the doctrine of the Trinity from a somewhat different angle. I’ve called the Trinity an “inspired deduction”, a conclusion which the early Christians felt obliged to draw based on their experience of Jesus, whose miraculous life (they believed) could not be accounted for unless He were truly Divine. Christ was for them, as for all Christians, the Revelation of God, and given

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<sup>1</sup> Strange as it may sound to say, in the Orthodox view there’s a kind of *hierarchy* within the Divine. The Biblical basis for this idea can be found in two verses in the Gospel of John. Christ says in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one”, thus implying that He’s truly Divine. But then He goes on to say in John 14:28, “The Father is greater than I”, suggesting that within the Divinity of the Supreme Principle there’s some kind of order and rank. According to the Orthodox, what is true of the Son is also true of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit too is truly Divine, and yet Its Divinity, like the Son’s, is derivative from that of the Father, who remains for all eternity the Spirit’s ontological source. Hence the teaching of St Irenaeus (c. 130 - c. 200), which is quoted by Ware, that the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity are to be understood as the “two hands” of the Father (35).

this fact it was clear to them that there must be some sort of diversity within the ultimate Source of all things. Do remember, however, that while the systematic theologian always *begins* with belief, with a believing response to Revelation, he must *then* set to work with his *mind*, not only to draw the appropriate conclusions, but to explain and clarify those conclusions, working out their implications. According to St Thomas Aquinas—I’m quoting from our earlier reading this term—“sacred doctrine makes use of human reason, not indeed to prove faith ... but to make clear [the] things that are set forth in this doctrine” (14), in this case the doctrine of the Trinity. The Christian claim that the Supreme Reality is expressed as three distinct Persons is a case in point. The doctrine of the Trinity, says the theologian, is *not* something the human mind would have come up with on its own, but once the idea is accepted it’s perfectly legitimate for us to employ arguments and analogies in order to understand it better.

This is precisely what Ware is doing in our book when he examines the implications of *person* and *love*. He admits, as I just did, that the Trinity “is something revealed to us by God, not demonstrated by our own reason” (31). But in the opening section of the chapter, he nonetheless makes use of his reason for the sake of enhancement and confirmation. “Why believe in the Trinity?” he asks (28), and then by way of answer he proposes two syllogisms:

1. God is personal. Personhood implies reciprocity, hence diversity. Therefore, there must be diversity in God.

2. God is love. Love implies relationship, hence plurality. Therefore, there must be plurality in God. (Though he doesn’t say so explicitly, Ware is basing himself in this case on the Scriptures, namely, 1 John 4:8, which says that “he who does not love does not know God; for God is love.”)

A similar argument in defense of the Trinity has sometimes been made on the basis of what it means to be good. St Bonaventure—the same theologian who defined God as “an intelligible sphere the center of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere”—is notable here. In his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, “The Soul’s Journey into God” (6.2), he puts forward the following argument:

3. God is good. (In fact Christ said, “*None* is good but God alone” [Matt. 19:17].) Goodness implies sharing, since—as Bonaventure puts it—it’s in the very nature of the

good to be “self-diffusive”. (St Dionysius the Areopagite speaks in a similar way about God’s “supernatural fecundity” [Reader, 28]). In other words he who is truly good wishes to communicate or share that goodness with others as fully as possible. But communication or sharing implies community. Therefore, there must be community in God.

Now of course neither Ware nor St Bonaventure has given us any reasons to think that the Divine must be precisely *three-fold*. The fact that God is personal, that He is love, and that He is good may help us to understand why He must be more than just a monolithic unicity. But it’s not yet obvious why there couldn’t just as easily be a Holy Duality or a Holy Quaternity rather than a Holy Trinity. In order to grasp the essential “threeness” of Divinity, the theologian must undertake a more searching kind of reflection. One way to account for the specific number *three* is to approach the doctrine from a qualitative or symbolic or (what we might call) “Pythagorean” point of view. I can’t even begin to go into all the subtleties here, but basically the approach would look something like this:

It’s true to say that *the Divine is one*. But to leave the matter there risks misleading someone into thinking that Its unicity is static or frozen or discrete. God is one thing, and I’m one thing, and a potato is one thing, and all these things are different “things”. As you know, however—for all the apophatic reasons we’ve already emphasized—this would be a most inadequate way of construing God. For God is not a thing at all, not an object set apart from all others. It would therefore be better to say that *the Divine is two*, for two is a number that can help us grasp the movement and dynamism and self-diffusiveness and paradoxical qualities of God. *Two* serves to remind us (among other things) that God is absolute and infinite, transcendent and immanent, beyond and within, and in this respect at least a Divine Duality makes considerable sense. Whereas *one* (speaking in Pythagorean terms) is the number of source or principle, the number of origin, *two* is the number of manifestation and creativity. Therefore, to say that God is *two* is to affirm that it’s God Himself who is expressed in His creative activity. Nevertheless, if you think about the matter even more deeply, you’ll see that even two isn’t enough. To cut short our meditation here would be to suggest that in going outside of Himself through His Divine self-expression, God has become something “other” than

what He was before—that He’s left His previous self behind and become something new or different. Two is the number of manifestation, but it’s also the number of division or separation. Therefore, (such a reflection continues) *the Divine must be three*. For three is the number of return, of integration, of recapitulation. It’s the number of totality, community, and completeness. Symbolically understood, the number 3 implies that in the process of flowing forth from Himself God does *not* leave Himself behind, but takes Himself with Him as it were into Himself. “1” is the Absolute, and “2” is the Infinite—or better the root of the Infinite. But true infinity is not a mere unbounded extension or an endless duration. God is omnipresent, not ubiquitous; He’s eternal, not perpetual. And what this means is that *He’s altogether and always everywhere and at all times that He is*. “3” is for this reason the best of numbers for evoking God’s essence, and hence the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the best way of representing Divinity.

Yet another, somewhat less esoteric, way of approaching the reason for threeness in God has to do with the fact that man was created in God’s image and likeness. C. S. Lewis writes, “When we come to man, the highest of the animals, we get the completest resemblance to God which we know of” (57). Lewis is basing his observation on the account of man’s creation in the first chapter of Genesis: “And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness.... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them” (Gen. 1:26-27). We’ll be saying much more about this important Biblical text when we turn to a discussion of creation in conjunction with the third chapter of Ware. But for now the point is simply this: if man is God’s image on earth—if he’s in some way a reflection or a copy of God—then presumably we should be able to understand God better by first understanding ourselves. More precisely, if we discover within our own natures a kind of trinity, this may help us better grasp why and how it is that there must also be a Divine Trinity.

Here’s where the selection in the Reader from St Augustine comes in. Augustine, a theologian and bishop of the fourth and fifth centuries (354-430 A.D.)—and by scholarly consensus the greatest of the western Church fathers—explains at the outset of the assigned reading: “We are indeed seeking a trinity, but not any trinity at all, but that Trinity which is God, and the true, the supreme, and the only God” (42). And he goes on to make clear—in language reminiscent of the Athanasian Creed—what is meant by this

Trinity: “Let us believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God, the Creator, and the Ruler of the whole creature; that the Father is not the Son, nor is the Holy Spirit the Father or the Son, but that there is a trinity of inter-related powers, and the unity of an equal substance” (43).

Now in order more clearly to understand this doctrine, Augustine endeavors in the selection you’ve read to “see the image of God in ourselves” (45)—to be more precise, in that part of ourselves he calls the “mind”. He’s well aware of the fact that God is described in the Scriptures as a spiritual and therefore invisible Reality (see John 4:24), and he therefore believes it would be a mistake to seek for God’s reflection in the form or substance of our physical bodies. We must look instead *within* ourselves, at our own invisible and inward nature. We should look, more precisely, at that with which we do our looking, at the mental power of looking itself. “Whatever may be the nature of the power by which we see through the eyes, we certainly do not see the power itself,” Augustine writes, “but we seek it in the mind.... As the mind itself, therefore, gathers the knowledge of corporeal things through the bodily senses, so it gains the knowledge of incorporeal things through itself” (45). Since God is Himself incorporeal or bodiless, it’s clear that God can’t be understood by looking outward through the senses, but must instead be sought within. Augustine doesn’t actually quote this text, but one is reminded of Christ’s words in the Gospel: “The Kingdom of God comes not by observation.... The Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21).

So in order to get a clearer picture of the meaning of Trinity, we have to look first at something closer to home, something that exists within our own minds. What do we actually see in looking into those minds? What we see, says Augustine, is that they are themselves trinitarian in their basic structure. By a careful process of introspection we’re led to distinguish between three distinct, but united elements: namely, the mind itself, the mind’s knowledge of itself, and the mind’s love of itself. The first, the *mind itself*, is simply our power of knowing: it’s what allows us to be certain that the sum of the interior angles of a triangle totals 180 degrees, or that every whole is greater than its part. The second, the *mind’s knowledge of itself*, is the content of the mind when it turns its attention back on itself. On the one hand, the knowledge that our minds have of themselves is *distinct* from those minds, for at any given moment we could start thinking

about something else (and most often we do!), and then, although the mind would continue to be present and active, its self-knowledge would not. Nevertheless, while the mind *is* thinking of itself, the mind and its knowledge are *essentially or substantially the same*, for everything true of the mind is reflected back on the mind when it thinks about itself, in much the same way your image is reflected back to you in a mirror—though with this very important difference: in the case of the mind, the relationship is much more intimate, for there is no spatial separation or inversion of directions as there is with your image in a looking-glass. The mind and its self-knowledge, while distinct from each other, are completely the same in their essence. The same thing is true, says Augustine, when it comes to what he calls the *mind's love of itself*. “Love” in this context may seem an odd word to be using. I suggest that by love he means something like “identification” or “attachment”. To say that the mind “loves” itself is simply to say that it identifies what it knows when it sees itself with itself: it says to itself, “Hey, that’s me! That’s my true self. This is who I really am”, and in so saying the mind is united with itself in a bond of respect. Augustine’s point is that this self-respect or self-love, like self-knowledge, is not simply the same thing as the mind, for we can in fact make these very subtle distinctions between mental “parts”. On the other hand, the mind’s love of itself, which consists in its affirmation of itself as an “I” or a person, has precisely the same content or essence as the mind; there is no “substantial” or “essential” difference between them.

Thus, by looking carefully into ourselves, we’re able to discover something that can help us better understand the Trinitarian relationships among the three Divine Persons. To quote Augustine once more: “There is a certain image of the Trinity: the mind itself [which corresponds to the Father, he says], its knowledge, which is its offspring [corresponding to the Son], and love as a third [which corresponds to the Spirit]; these three are one and one substance. The offspring is not less, while the mind knows itself as much as it is; nor is the love less, while the mind loves itself as much as it knows and as much as it is” (51-52).

Granted, this way of approaching the Trinity presupposes a very high degree of contemplative focus. In order to begin at least glimpsing what the saint is talking about, you have to be able to slow your thinking down from its usual speed and to quiet all the chatter and noise that’s usually going on in our heads. Augustine, in other words, requires

that you *concentrate* and be at least minimally *self-aware*. If you can't do this—if your mind continues to wander—you won't be able to understand what he means, nor will his exposition be of much use in helping you understand the doctrine of the Trinity. But then, of course, that's not *his* fault! So do try to concentrate as you read, or re-read, his words. The effort will be rewarding for those who give it their best.

## Lecture 8: Living the Trinity

Let me begin as usual with a quick review of my last lecture. There were basically two parts. In the first, we continued to discuss the structure of the Trinity. I began by modifying the diagram I'd proposed in the previous class. I had said that the three Persons might be pictured as three distinct spokes emerging from a central axis or hub labeled "G" (= God). But as I then explained, this model can be deceiving, since, according to ancient Christian Tradition, the Person of the Father is alone the true "G". The Father is the source or principle of the Son and the Spirit, and it's from the Father that the Divinity of these other two Persons is derived. One thinks of Christ's words in the Gospel of John, as He prays to the Father: "This is eternal life, that they know Thee the *only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

I went on to describe the difference between Eastern and Western views of the Trinity, a difference having to do with the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the other two Persons. Whereas in the East the Spirit is understood to proceed from the Father alone, in the West it's taught that the Spirit proceeds from *both* the Father *and* the Son—"and the Son" being a translation of the word *filioque* in Latin, a word which was added to the Nicene Creed and which helped drive a wedge (together with the question of the role of the Bishop of Rome, or the Pope) between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Finally, I brought that part of the lecture to a close by saying just a few things about how this difference in one's view of the Trinity can affect in turn one's view of salvation.

In the second part of the lecture, I turned to some of the ways in which theologians have attempted to come to a deeper understanding of the Trinity by the use of reason, argument, and analogy. Some have tried to make sense of the "Divine diversity", if one might use such a phrase, by pondering the implications of God's being personal, loving, and good; others have reflected on the nature of numbers and have tried to grasp the essential "3-ness" of God by examining the symbolic properties of unity, duality, and trinity; and yet others, like St Augustine, have attempted to come to terms with the doctrine by comparing God with His reflection in man. If man is created in God's image, it should be possible to find at least some hint of the Trinity within human nature, and by

exploring that human triplicity theologians hope to confirm and enhance their understanding of Divinity. I directed your attention to the way in which Augustine attempts to examine the image of the Trinity in the human mind. What we discover (he says) is that the mind, its knowledge of itself, and its love of itself are three different but interdependent aspects of a single whole: each of them is essential to that mind, and each interpenetrates the others, flowing throughout the entire mind. This, of course, is precisely what the Christian is taught with respect to the Trinity: that in it, too, there are three distinct dimensions, each of which is nonetheless essentially one with the others.

I come now to the last of my lectures on the Trinity, and to the last of our discussions of point I.A. in the Outline of Systematic Theology. Beginning next time, we'll turn our attention to the next chapter of Ware, "God as Creator", and thus to II.B.—to the question of what God *does*, not what He *is*. What I would like to do today, in concluding this section of the course, is to return to the connection between the Christian understanding of God and Christian views of salvation, and this time, as I expand somewhat on my earlier comments, I'm going to enlist the help once again of C. S. Lewis.

As I noted in Lecture 7, how one thinks of the Trinity, in particular how one views the "position" of the Holy Spirit relative to the other two Persons, has important consequences for one's understanding of how far a man or woman may go in the direction of union with God. I contrasted Christian perspectives on the Trinity by pointing out that the West, because of the *filioque*, tends to envision the Trinity as inwardly "glued" together by the Spirit, with the result being that God is construed as "impenetrable". In the East, however—owing to the doctrine of the "single procession"—it's more common for the Spirit to be pictured as an "extension" of God into the world and as a means (together with the Son) by which He renders Himself "accessible" to human entry. To express this more simply, Catholics and Protestants typically have a "closed" view of the Trinity, while Orthodox have a more "open" view.

Please remember that these are all approximations, as I called them last time. I certainly don't mean to imply that for Catholics and Protestants God is "close-minded", that is, aloof or indifferent. However they picture Him, *all* Christians believe that God is essentially love, that He deeply cares for His creatures and willingly enters into

relationships with them. This fundamental fact the Christian West by no means denies. Nonetheless, while completely agreeing that God is fully present in the world by virtue of His immanence—and thus intimately involved in its life and its destiny—the Western Christian is inclined to see Him as forever sealed against the entry of His creatures. As I noted last time, man’s relationship with God must therefore remain for Roman Catholics and Protestants, even in its most intimate form—even in Heaven—a matter of external beholding or vision.

By contrast, in the Eastern perspective, the Holy Spirit is not simply a function of the Son’s relationship with the Father, not simply the Love that unites the loving Father to the beloved Son (as Augustine proposed, and as I mentioned last time). Like the Son the Spirit comes directly from the Father alone, and like the Son again the Spirit is understood to be responsible for expressing, manifesting, and “incarnating” the super-essential Reality of God the Father in Its own unique way. To use once more the words of St Irenaeus, the Son and the Spirit are the “two hands of the Father”. Ware, as I’ve noted before, goes to considerably lengths in describing how these hands work together in carrying out God’s will in the world, all the way from the creation itself to the consecration of the sacraments (35-36). But the important point for us to see right now is that in the Eastern view, this “two-handed” approach of the Father toward the world results in the Divine being much more “open” and “permeable”. The Spirit is not what unites the Father and the Son to each other, not what turns God as it were in on Himself. Rather the Spirit is a distinctive agent in Its own right in uniting God to the world.

Here again a couple of diagrams might be helpful, though (as always) we’ll have to toss them aside at some point lest they end up misleading us. In the case of the Western conception of the Trinity, picture a triangle—an equilateral triangle, to be precise, with its apex pointed down and enclosing a certain space. (This will be clearer when we discuss it in class!) This “triangular God” can go everywhere and be everywhere. He’s at once above and below, outside and inside, everything that exists. But though He can and does enter all things, He’s not really entered into Himself. The three “sides” of His structure keep His Divinity *in*, and at the same time they keep others *out*. As for the Eastern perspective, visualize again a triangular shape, but position it in such a way that its apex is pointed up, and rather than drawing a line between its other two

points, the space between them should be pictured as open. This isn't really a triangle at all, of course, but rather (geometrically speaking) two rays—the “ray” of the Son and the “ray” of the Spirit—emerging from the single “point” of the Father. The Divinity thus pictured remains unconfined. Not only can He enter into all things; the bottom “wedge” of the Roman Catholic and Protestant picture can do that as well. In the Orthodox view, however, God not only condescends to come among things; He permits His very “contents”, His intrinsic Divinity, to flow into them as well. It's the difference between placing a glass of water into another, larger glass, and pouring the water from the first glass into the second. To continue with the same analogy, we could add that the first “glass” corresponds to what we've called the Essence of God, while the “water” corresponds to His energies. Because the Divine is open not closed in the Eastern perspective, fluid not solid, all things can enter into Him. He enters them, and they enter Him. In fact (say the Orthodox) this is the goal both the Son and the Holy Spirit are working toward, that all creation might come to participate or share in the Divine and deifying energies of God Himself, in order that (as St Paul puts it in 1 Cor. 15:28) God might be “all in all”.

I readily admit that this closed-versus-open distinction has significant limits. I don't want you to go away thinking that these triangular shapes are literal representations of God! But perhaps by their means we can at least begin to see something of what Ware is talking about, early in the chapter, when he tells the reader that “the final end of the spiritual Way is that we humans should also become part of this Trinitarian coinherence or *perichoresis*, being wholly taken up into the circle of love that exists within God” (28). This is a typical Orthodox way of speaking. Salvation is not just a matter of being *with* or *near* God, nor is Heaven simply a blessed state of Divine proximity. Salvation—“deification”, as the Orthodox call it—consists instead in our *entering into* God, entering into the space (as it were) “between” the Son and the Spirit, and sharing in the “field” of Divine energies that pass between Them.

Ware uses a technical term for this relational movement between the Persons, the Greek word *perichoresis*, which we might translate as “circular dance”. The verb *choreo*, from which we get the English word “choreography”, means literally “to make room for another, to give way, or draw back”. One is meant to picture something like the fluid

movements of a martial artist, who, rather than meeting force with force, allows the power of an aggressor to defeat itself by simply standing aside. Meanwhile, the prefix *peri*—which you can see in the English word “perimeter”—means “around about” or simply “around”. (The perimeter, after all, passes *around* something, right?) So, putting this all together, the word *perichoresis* has to do with the process of giving way to another in a circular pattern: hence my suggested translation of a “circular dance”. (The Latin term for the same relationship is *circumincessio*, whence the technical theological term, often used in this connection, of “circumincession”.) In any case, it’s into this Divine and eternal “dance” that man must enter, according to Orthodox theology, if he means to be saved or perfected. Recognizing that this view of salvation may be surprising to his Western readers, Ware quickly supplies a Biblical support for his claim (p. 28): “So Christ prayed to His Father on the night before His Crucifixion: ‘May they all be one: as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, so may they also be one in us’ (John 17:21).” Notice *in*, and not *with*. Man is to enter *into* God, and not just be *with* Him.

But of course there’s also this to be added. In order to enter “into” Divinity—in order to participate in the intra-Trinitarian dance of the Godhead—human nature must be changed in such a way that its own structure conforms to this “perichoretic” pattern. Once again I’m getting ahead of the story, as always happens in systematic theology. We’ll return to the full meaning of this change when we come to the chapter in Ware that’s specifically devoted to the subject of “God as Spirit” (Chapter 5), and I’ll focus more directly on the details of salvation then. All I want for you to see right now is that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, in addition to what it tells us about *God*, serves at the same time as a kind of blueprint for *human* perfection. (This is true for *all* traditional Christians, though Orthodoxy tends to stress the point a bit more than the West.) Last time we spoke about how we can better understand the Trinity by looking first at ourselves; now, however, the aim is to see how we can better understand ourselves by first looking at the Trinity. To put the point as succinctly as I can—we’ll wrestle with this idea more fully in class—the doctrine of the Trinity is intended to serve as a model for human relationships.

Here’s the problem. So distorted is our fallen conception of existence that apart from the Revelation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, we might never have imagined

that things can exist without friction or conflict. *You* are *you*, it seems, only insofar as you are *not* someone else, and *I* am *I* only insofar as I'm *not* you. We formulate this seeming fact as a law of physics when we state that two objects can't occupy the same space at the same time. But as it turns out the principle applies to more than just physical substances. It's the law, says Christianity, of man's present, egocentric condition. Because of our pride and our envy and our anger and fear, we refuse to realize that one thing may actually become *more* what it is through giving way to another. Fallen man fails to understand that in refusing to give, he makes himself less.

The doctrine of the Trinity is meant in part to shatter these assumptions, for it shows us that in the Divine Reality, which is incomparably greater than we are, greatness eternally returns to itself through its deliberate or voluntary loss. God the Father, the doctrine explains, *is* a Father precisely by virtue of His having a Son, to whom He communicates the fullness of Deity—to whom He transmits, without reservation, every last drop of His being as God. Thus Christ says, “As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself” (John 5:26), and “all that the Father has is mine” (John 16:15). The doctrine teaches, furthermore, that the Son is a Son by virtue of having a Father, whom He honors in all things, and before whom He utterly effaces Himself in order to be a mirror of the Father's glory. Thus Christ can declare, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing, for whatever He does, that the Son does likewise” (John 5:19); or again, “He that has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). But there's more to the story. For according to Christianity the Supreme Reality not only gives of Itself to Itself, from Father to Son, and from the Son back to the Father. It's a Reality in which the giving of each to the other is at the same time a gift of their Being to the world and to man. And so Christ can say further, in telling the disciples about the imminent pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, that “He will not speak of Himself” but “will glorify Me, for He will take what is mine”, which of course is what the Son has received from the Father, “and declare it *to* you” (John 16:14)—declaring it so unreservedly, in fact, that “He will be *in* you” (John 14:17).

As I've admitted several times already, there's no hope of our proving or grasping the doctrine of the Trinity by means of reason alone. Nevertheless, it's possible to begin

discerning, if ever so dimly, a certain logic or pattern here, the same pattern that goes into a graceful dance. The Trinity turns out to be rather like one of Zeno's paradoxes of motion: we may not be able *figure* it out in a purely discursive or mathematical way, but we can *act* it out. According to the ancient philosopher Zeno of Elea (490-430 B.C.), you can't traverse a given distance without first going half the way, nor can you travel *that* half until you've first gone half of *that*, and so on and on. Hence, he contended, no motion is possible. Or so it seems to the merely rational mind, paralyzed as it is by the conceptual stipulations of the problem—until of course we actually begin to move. Hence, the response of Diogenes of Sinope (412-323 B.C.), another ancient philosopher: *Solvitur ambulando*—"It is solved by walking!" Well, something like that is at stake with the Trinity. Treat it simply as a logical puzzle, and it may seem absurd. But view it instead as a recipe for a certain mode of action, the action Christians call love, and it begins to make sense. For in fact what the doctrine does is to magnify as it were to Divine proportions the persistent message of Christ that "he who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (see, among the parallel passages, Matt. 10:39). In contemplating the unity of the three Persons, man comes face to face with the fact that self-abnegation or self-denial is the key to true life. All of this remains a great mystery, of course, which can't help but flummox the person who would penetrate rationally to its most inward of meanings. And yet the difficulty of the doctrine can be overcome nonetheless, not so much by the mind (with its thought) as by the will (in its "motion").

Ware calls this "living the Trinity" in the concluding section of the chapter. "There is an integral connection," he writes, "between our love for one another and our faith in the Trinity: the first is a precondition for the second, and in its turn the second gives full strength and meaning to the first. So far from being pushed into the corner and treated as a piece of abstruse theologizing of interest only to specialists, the doctrine of the Trinity ought to have upon our daily life an effect that is nothing less than revolutionary. Made after the image of God the Trinity, human beings are called to reproduce on earth the mystery of mutual love that the Trinity lives in heaven" (38-39).

C. S. Lewis shares this same basic approach. "Theology is practical" (Reader, 54), he says. It's concerned above all (as Lewis sees it) with the very practical fact that

through Christ and the Spirit, human beings may come to share in the life of God Himself. Lewis distinguishes, remember, between two Greek words for life, *Bios* and *Zoê*. He uses the first to refer to organic, biological, or simply “natural” life, and the second to refer (and I quote) to “the Spiritual life which is in God from all eternity, and which made the whole natural universe”. “The point in Christianity which gives the greatest shock,” he asserts, “is the statement that by attaching ourselves to Christ, we can ‘become Sons of God’” (55), passing from *Bios* to *Zoê* and exchanging our natural for a supernatural condition. “A man who changed from having *Bios* to having *Zoê*,” says Lewis, “would have gone through as big a change as a statue which changed from being a carved stone to being a real man” (57). This is Lewis’s imaginative way of describing salvation.

He goes on to relate these ideas to the doctrine of the Trinity. “It is only Christians,” he claims, “who have any idea of how human souls can be taken into the life of God and yet remain themselves—in fact be very much more themselves than they were before” (58), and it’s the Trinity, he says, that gives us a foretaste as to how this is accomplished. “I warned you that theology is practical,” Lewis continues. “The whole purpose for which we exist is to be thus taken into the life of God,” adding that “wrong ideas about what that life is will make it harder” (58). At this point, he introduces a geometrical analogy. In the Trinitarian relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, what we call personality on the human level is lifted up and transformed by recombination in a higher dimension. According to Lewis we can get a glimpse of what this might be like if we think about the difference between six squares as they exist side by side on a single plane and six squares as they combine with each other in three dimensional space to form a cube. The squares are to the cube what the three Persons are to the Divine Reality.

Now of course we’re not squares; we’re people. (Well, *some* of us may be “squares”!) We don’t combine with each other to form cubes, but we can undertake our own appropriate mode of combination in accordance with the form or pattern of love. As for Ware so for Lewis: the doctrine of the Trinity shouldn’t be approached merely in the abstract as a remote and impractical fact about some distant Reality. No, “the thing that matters,” writes Lewis, “is being actually drawn into that three-personal life” (59), and

for this to take place—he again sides with Ware—one must be involved in some way in “living the Trinity”. “Consequently,” Lewis concludes, “the one really adequate instrument for learning about God is the whole Christian community.... Christian brotherhood is, so to speak, the technical equipment for this science—the laboratory outfit” (61).

Don’t make a mistake here: You mustn’t let all this talk about practicality and laboratories seduce you into forgetting that God remains a great Mystery: a “dazzling darkness” and unfathomable paradox. Connecting the Trinity to our lives in this world shouldn’t lead to assuming that the Divine is any *less* than we’d thought. It should lead instead to the realization that our relationships with other people, seemingly so humdrum and ordinary, are actually *more* than we’d thought—to the discovery, in other words, that human life itself is a form of the Mystery.

**Lecture 9:**  
**Creation *Ex Nihilo***

We come today to an immensely important part of our studies this term. Not of course that there are any *unimportant* parts to systematic theology! In the science of God and deification, as you've begun to realize (I hope), everything depends upon everything else. But today marks an especially crucial juncture. What we say now, how we approach certain ideas, will determine virtually everything else that's to come later on. For as you've probably noticed, not only are all the doctrines *linked* in a systematic theology. There's also a kind of "snowball" effect in that the conclusions and discoveries of earlier discussions are presupposed and incorporated in subsequent explorations. *Systematics*, in this respect at least, is like *mathematics*. As a course in theology unfolds, you're not just encountering new data, as you might in a history course. Instead you're trying to discern the implications of previous teachings, trying to understand the deeper and ever more inward meaning of certain axioms.

Lots of things are going on in the third chapter of Ware. So far this semester, in Chapters 1 and 2, our focus has been on point I.A. of our Outline of Systematic Theology, on the "isness" or nature of the Supreme Reality. We've been concerned with what it means to be Divine, and hence our discussions (whether of mystery or Trinity) have centered on God as He is in Himself, beyond all reference to space and time. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, our attention will shift to point III of the outline, to the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and at that point we'll be considering God insofar as He enters space and time "for us and for our salvation" (as the Nicene Creed puts it). In the meantime, however, what we're faced with right now, in Chapter 3, is the stuff in the middle. We're obliged at this point to try to come to terms with everything that happened "between God and Christmas"! And what we discover is that during this period of "time"—take note of those quotations marks; we'll come back to them later—the two most important things that occurred theologically came at or very near the start: namely, the Creation of the world and the Fall of man. According to the Christian religion, something came into being that was other than God, and then that something went horribly wrong. Made by God good, the world soon became bad.

These two foundational Christian dogmas are both treated in the third chapter of *The Orthodox Way*. When it comes to the first, the doctrine of creation, Ware discusses, on the one hand, the idea of creation itself—what exactly it means to say, as Christians do, that the world was created “from nothing”—and, on the other hand, he looks with some care at the original and proper nature of that special creature called Man. To use some technical vocabulary, he introduces us in this way to both *cosmogony* and *anthropology*. As for the doctrine of the Fall, he again discusses two points. First, he considers the problem of evil, and he provides some of the keys for a solution to this problem, what theologians call a *theodicy*. Second, he engages in *hamartiology* (or the “study of sin”) by examining the effects of evil on the human creature in particular, and ends by suggesting how one might not only *solve* the problem of evil in an abstract or philosophical way, but *resolve* it by means of a spiritual and ascetic practice. Here Ware anticipates certain points he’ll be explaining more carefully in Chapter 6, “God as Prayer”.

We’re going to be spending three sessions on these topics, and my plan is to divide them up as follows. In this lecture I’ll focus on Christian *cosmogony*, specifically on the traditional teaching that God created the world “out of nothing”. I’ll be referring to the first part of Ware’s chapter as well as alluding to the Reader. Both of the selections in the Reader—one as usual from C. S. Lewis and the other from a medieval Dominican theologian and mystic, Meister Eckhart—are concerned mainly with the doctrine of creation. I plan to turn next to the whole question of evil and thus to Christian *theodicy*, saving a third and final lecture for examining Christianity’s understanding of man and his fallen state, its *anthropology* and *hamartiology*. As always, all of these issues are closely tied to each other, so I’ll have to do plenty of anticipating and recalling, but this seems to me the best order for discussing these profound and crucial doctrines. So, without further ado: the Christian doctrine of creation. Christians believe the entire universe was created from God out of nothing. But what does this mean?

The first thing I must tell you is that this doctrine, like the doctrine of the Trinity, is not explicitly Biblical. Nowhere do the scriptures say unequivocally that God made the world (to use the Latin phrase) *ex nihilo* or “out of nothing”. Two of the most important Biblical passages in this regard are Genesis 1:1-2 and John 1:3, and neither of them is

unambiguous. According to Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” Now it’s certainly clear in this passage that the world had no shape and no content until God began His work of creating. Relying, however, on this passage alone, it’s possible to assume that in His act of creation God made use of some already existing “raw material”, some as-yet-unformed stuff or empty container, which he then shaped or filled as a sculptor would a piece of clay or as Santa Claus would a Christmas stocking. In other words, one might suppose there was already something other than Himself, which God relied upon for His work of world making. As for the New Testament parallel, the Gospel of John tells us, “All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” The word “Him” here refers to the “Word”, the *Logos*, which John has just told us is “with” God and “is” God, and which is none other than the Divine Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. Here again, however, it’s not absolutely clear that the creation is out of nothing. Indeed the second part of the verse seems to suggest that there might have been something else besides the Maker, something which was not God, but which was nonetheless not itself created. The phrase “without Him was not anything made *that was made*” leaves the door open to something other than the Word that was like Him in being “not-made”, and who can say whether this other mysterious something wasn’t itself used in creation?

So no, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is not explicitly Biblical. Rather, like the Trinity, it’s a matter of “deduction”—in this case a deduction from the premise that God is omnipotent, a premise which is itself rooted in the essential illimitability of the Divine Mystery. God (remember) is “that than which nothing greater can be thought”, to make use of the Anselmian formula. He must therefore be—among other things—that than which no more *powerful* a being can be thought, which means that He must possess total power or omnipotence. This being so, it follows that in creating the universe God needed nothing. If He’d been obliged to employ an already existing material or tool, or if He depended on some already available supply of energy, then it would be untrue to say of Him that He’s the Absolute and the Infinite. But if He’s not absolute and infinite, then He’s not really God, and that of course would be a contradiction in terms: God cannot not

be God, for no X can be “not-itself”. We’re thus constrained by a *reductio ad absurdum* to believe that the creation of the world was “from nothing”. Several early Church fathers follow this line of argument, among them St Athanasius of Alexandria, whom I’ve mentioned before. Writing in the early fourth century against certain pagan cosmogonies, in which the creator-god was conceived as a kind of “demiurge” or cosmic craftsman, Athanasius reasons as follows: “Because God is infinite, not finite, [the universe] was not made from pre-existent matter, but out of nothing.... God brought it into being through the Word [alone]” (*On the Incarnation*, 3). Such logic became enshrined in the liturgical prayers and early creeds of the Church. Ware quotes (for example) from the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom (c. 347 - 407): “Thou hast brought us into being out of nothing” (44). The same basic idea is present in the Nicene Creed, though the word “nothing” isn’t used. The Creed begins, “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth [Genesis, of course, had said as much, but now the Creed takes a further step], and of *all* things, visible *and* invisible.” In other words—to use modern terminology—God is the maker not merely of matter, which is visible, but also of energy, which is invisible. Thus, when He creates, He depends upon nothing whatsoever beyond Himself, and it’s for this reason that one should speak of creation as taking place *ex nihilo*.

It’s very important that we understand the nature of this *nihil* or nothingness. If you think about it, “nothing” is a very peculiar, very slippery idea, and it can easily be used to lay traps for the unwary. I’m reminded of a bit of graffiti I once saw during my graduate student days at a well-known university in Massachusetts. It took the form of a syllogism: “Nothing is better than a Harvard education. A third grade education is better than nothing. Therefore a third grade education is better than a Harvard education!” What you can see in this silly example is that the word *nothing* is often used in a relative, or relational, way. It’s like a little kid who’s caught sneaking candy from the cupboard. “What *are* you doing?!” his mother demands. “Nothing!” he blurts out in reply. To which, of course, were she a dialectician, Mama might well reply, “Don’t be foolish, son. You *can’t* mean *nothing*. You *are* breathing, aren’t you? You *are* standing there looking at me, aren’t you? You *are* wondering whether you’ll ever sit down again when I’m done with you, aren’t you?!” And of course all the kid meant to claim was that he wasn’t doing

anything of the sort a good mother would object to. “Nothing” was an ellipsis for “nothing bad” or “nothing objectionable”.

This is also how the word *nothing* is being used in the phrase “creation from nothing”. Nothing or nothingness *doesn’t* mean an absolute void or a vacuum. Many Christians, I find, have a sort of hazy picture in their mind’s eye of God reaching down into a black hole of empty space and extracting the universe, as a magician might pull a rabbit from a hat. But in fact, strange as it may sound to say, not even God could pull off such a stunt, for it would be a sheer contradiction to think that *something* could be brought into being from *nothing*. God, however awesome His power, can’t violate the law of non-contradiction. Though He’s a mystery, remember, He’s not an absurdity. If there’s really nothing to start with, then there will *always* be nothing, for as the medieval scholastics like St Thomas Aquinas put it, *ex nihilo nihil fit*, a principle which that great philosopher Julie Andrews confirmed in *The Sound of Music* when she sang (in translation): “*Nothing comes from nothing*, nothing ever could, so somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good!” As if Julie Andrews weren’t enough, we have C. S. Lewis’s testimony in the Reader: “I know that to create is defined as ‘to make out of nothing’, *ex nihilo*. But I take that to mean ‘not out of any pre-existing material’. It can’t mean that God makes what God has not thought of, or that He gives His creatures any powers or beauties which He Himself does not possess. Why, we think that even human work comes nearest to creation when the maker has ‘got it all out of his own head’” (74).

Lewis is exactly right. As understood in the Christian tradition, the nothingness of the doctrine of “creation from nothing” is a relative, not an absolute, nothingness, and when one says therefore that God makes things *from nothing*, this is actually a short-hand way of saying that He creates things *from nothing-other-than-Himself*. To go back one more time to the Latin, what we really ought to be saying is that the universe came into being *ex nihilo praeter Deum*, that is, “from nothing except, or in addition to, God”. Thus Ware writes, “Rather than say that [God] created the universe out of nothing, we should say that He created it out of His own self, which is love” (44). Lewis reiterates the same point when he writes, “Our reality is so much from His reality as He, moment by moment, projects into us” (72).

We have to be very careful here, however. Lewis is quick to stress that he's *not* espousing an "emanationist" philosophy. Emanationism is a cosmogony in which the universe is said to have come into existence in a purely automatic or necessary manner, as the inevitable overflow of its cosmic Source. As Lewis points out, what makes emanationism distinctive is the idea that the creation was something *involuntary* (74). Sunshine may be said to emanate from the sun, and water may be said to emanate from a fountain, because in both of these cases, there's an unconscious production of an effect from an inanimate cause. The sun can't help but shine, and the fountain can't help but flow. This, however, is very different from what the Christian believes about the way in which the universe is created by God. Creatures are not the result of anything as mechanical as that; they come about instead by virtue of a deliberate act, in which God *freely* "utters" them into being. When God says, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3a), He's speaking in full consciousness of what He's doing, and when we're told that "there *was* light" (Gen 1:3b), it's clear this result came about because of God's "choice". Ware insists on the very same point: "The words 'out of nothing' [in the doctrine of creation from nothing] signify, first and foremost, that God created the universe *by an act of his free will*. Nothing compelled him to create; he chose to do so. The world is not created unintentionally or out of necessity; it is not an automatic emanation or overflowing from God, but the consequence of divine choice" (44).

There's a very important subtlety or nuance here, though. Christianity won't permit us to say that God was compelled or coerced into producing the universe. On the contrary, the act of creation was free. Having said that, however, we must at the same time be very careful not to imagine God's freedom as if it meant the same thing to Him as ours does to us. When we consider our own free will or free choice, we usually think in terms of alternatives. Shall I choose the vanilla or the chocolate ice cream? Shall I major in psychology or in business? Shall I pick the path to the right or the one that goes to the left? When it comes to creation, however, it would be a big mistake to picture God at a sort of pre-universe cross-roads, thinking to Himself, in a paraphrase of *Hamlet*: "Hmm. To make or not to make, that's the question. Nobody can force Me to do it! I can do whatever I want! Hmmm.... so what exactly *do* I want?" This is a very easy, and very tempting, way of envisioning the process, but theologians know that it just doesn't work

that way for God. If you stop to think about it, you'll realize that it's impossible for an absolute, infinite, and omnipresent Reality to be confronted, like us, with what could in any sense be called an "alternative". The image of a man coming to a fork in the road makes no sense at all in the case of God. For "before" the creation—again the quotation marks are important—there "was" nothing but God, and hence no forks or alternatives or anything else that He could reasonably be said to have "faced". And therefore whatever the freedom of the Divine Mystery consists in, it's *not* the sort of freedom we think of as choice.

As it turns out, the word *freedom*, like the word *nothing*, is a strictly relative term in this context. God the Creator was certainly free from all compulsion and constraint. No one was there to tell Him what to do, or to hold a Sword of Damocles over His head, and in this sense the act of creation was completely free and spontaneous. On the other hand, God is never free *not* to be God. He can't retire as it were from the God-Business, but must always act in a way that is consistent with His nature. I said earlier that even God can't break the law of non-contradiction, and we come here to another application of that same principle. Whatever God *can* do, He *cannot* not be God—never in all eternity—and this implies a number of rather interesting consequences. It implies, for example, that God can't lie, for He *is* the Truth; nor can He commit suicide, for He *is* Life itself (see John 14:6). In the same way—to come now to the pertinent point in this context—He cannot *not* create, for it's in His very nature to be a creator, and He can't turn His back on that fact. The creation of the universe is thus a free act in the sense that God is not compelled by anything outside Himself, but it's not free from the point of view of His own internal nature or essence. Creation, we may therefore conclude, is *outwardly or extrinsically free*, but it's *inwardly or intrinsically necessary*. This is what Ware is trying to get at when he writes that while "God was under no compulsion to create ... that does not signify that there was anything incidental or inconsequential about His act of creation. God *is* all that He does, and so His act of creating is not something separate from Himself" (44-45).

Ware is propounding here an exceedingly important theological maxim, with numberless implications. *God is all that He does*. What this means is that there are no accidents, no surprises, no options, no appendages, no extras in God. You and I can be

what we are whether we go to the movies or not, whether we sleep in late or not, whether we travel to Singapore or not. Who and what we are remains as a kind of background or foundational fact, underlying any particular choice we may make or any act we perform. But the Supreme Reality is utterly different, in this respect as in all others! There are no parts or compartments in God such that one of them could remain the same while another one changed. Its three Persons notwithstanding, the great Mystery at the source of all things is a single, indivisible, simple, and seamless whole, which is completely beyond what we mean by choices and alternatives. And it follows, therefore—when it comes to the doctrine here considered—that from God’s *own* point of view, the universe could not have been left uncreated. It was therefore *necessary* that the creation take place.

Let me try to recapitulate the points I’ve made so far. According to the Christian tradition, the creation of the universe was “out of nothing”, *ex nihilo*; it was—to be more precise—“out of nothing but God”; to be yet more precise, it was “out of nothing but a free act of God”; indeed, to be as precise as possible, it was “out of nothing but a free act of God that was nonetheless (paradoxically) intrinsically necessary”.

I need to add one final point to this list of *out of* phrases. I just said that the creation *was* all of these things—I used the past tense—but actually (as Ware has told you in the book) that’s totally wrong. On the contrary, any adequate exposition of this doctrine must stress the fact that the creation of the universe takes place completely “*out of time* as we know it”, and hence that God’s creative act isn’t something that can be confined to the past. It’s not simply a *did*, but a *does* and a *shall do*. God *did* create, He *is* creating, and He *shall* continue to create according to a mode of action transcending all temporal categories. This too follows from the maxim that *God is all that He does*. If that principle is true, then whatever God does (I.B. of our outline), this *doing* is going to be consistent with the kind of *being* He is (I.A. of the outline). But of course what God *is* is eternal. His way of being is such that He’s present simultaneously at all times: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8). What we humans call the “past”, the “present”, and the “future” are all *now* for God. The past is still going on, and the future has already started. But think about it: If God *is* truly eternal, whatever He *does* He does eternally. If the adjective applies to the noun, the adverb must be applied to the verb. We, of course, can’t

adequately imagine what such an action consists in. About the best we can do is to describe an eternal act, one existing outside of time, as if it embraced *all* times, and so we end up saying that whatever God does, He is *always* doing: He never really “began” to do it, and He shall never “cease” doing it. And so, as I’ve already suggested, what we must affirm in this case is that God made, is making, and shall continue to make the world. (See the last paragraph on p. 45 of *The Orthodox Way*.)

It’s in light of these comments that we can begin understanding what’s going on in the Reader in the commentary by Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) on the opening words of Genesis. Eckhart makes a great deal of the fact that in the phrase “in the beginning God created the heaven and earth”, the word for *beginning* in the Latin translation he used—the word *principium*—can also mean “principle” or “reason for being”. (This is true as well for the Greek word *archê*, which is used in the Septuagint translation of this Genesis text, and which is repeated in John 1:1.) According to Eckhart, the word “beginning” need not therefore be taken in a merely chronological sense. Indeed—for the reasons we’ve just been discussing—when it comes to God’s act of creation, the primary meaning of the term *can’t* be chronological. The beginning of *everything* is not like the beginning of a class or a football game. These latter sorts of beginnings are moments in time that have something before them. But in the case of the universe, there were no previous moments, no prior time, to compare it to, and its *principium* or *archê* must therefore not be construed as if it took place on a particular date. Instead of supposing that the book of Genesis refers to a temporal moment of origin, Eckhart reasons instead that the term *principium* or “principle” must refer to God, the Source of all. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” means that *in Himself* God created all things. At least two points follow from this observation. It follows, first, that the universe is in some sense “inside” of God; and second, that the universe is in some sense eternal. Ware confirms the first conclusion in the distinction he draws between pantheism and panentheism (46), and he supports the second in writing that “in God’s heart and in His love, each one of us has always existed” (45).

Eckhart, of course, is considerably bolder than Ware and more deliberately provocative in his way of expressing these essential points. “When someone once asked me why God had not created the world earlier, I answered that He could not because He

did not exist. He did not exist before the world did.” Eckhart continues, softening just a bit this rhetorically puzzling blow, “How could He have created earlier when he had already created the world in the very now in which He was God? It is false to picture God as if He were waiting around for some future moment in which to create the world” (64).

Confused? Good! If you weren't, I'd be worried! Bring your questions to class, and we'll try together to plumb the depths of these demanding teachings.

**Lecture 10:**  
**The Illusion of Evil**

Last time we began our discussion of Chapter 3 of *The Orthodox Way*, a chapter in which the author discusses Christian doctrines having to do with the Creation and the Fall. I described these as transitional doctrines in the sense that they provide the necessary links between the Divine-as-It-is-in-Itself as Mystery and Trinity, on the one hand, and the Divine-as-It-is-for-the-world-and-for-man in Jesus Christ, on the other.

Our focus was Christian cosmogony, specifically the traditional Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Christianity insists—in contradistinction to certain other theories of where the universe came from—that it came only from God, a God who in His omnipotence needs no other power or resources than His own to create. To say that God creates “out of nothing” is therefore to say that He creates out of nothing *but God*, and this He does by a free act that is nonetheless necessary. I spent considerable time trying to come to terms with the meanings of *nothing* and *freedom*. The nothingness at issue here is not an absolute nothing or void. It must be understood instead in relation to God. Creation *ex nihilo* is actually an ellipsis for creation *ex nihilo praeter deum*. As for the idea of freedom, it’s important (I said) not to confuse God’s freedom with ours. It’s only a very naive anthropomorphism that thinks of the Divine as if It literally made choices between competing alternatives. To say that the act of creation is “free” doesn’t mean that God had an option *not* to create, for in fact it’s in His very nature to be a creator, and God is never free not to be God. Freedom here means instead that the Divinity was under no extrinsic compulsion or necessity and that the act was conscious and deliberate, not automatic or mechanical.

Finally, I spoke about one further important feature of this doctrine, namely, the fact that the creative act is eternal and hence outside the flow of time as we know it. Because the Divine is eternal, all its acts are eternal, and this in turn means that whatever God *does*, He’s *always* doing it. He doesn’t start and then stop, or change directions mid-stream. I emphasized the phrase from Ware that “God is all that He does”. The proposition is also true in reverse: *God does all that He is*. What we see in His actions (I.B. of our outline) are the explications or deployments of His very essence as God

(I.A.). Applying this fact to creation means that we must think of the creative act as perpetual. The Divine Reality made, is making, and shall continue to make all things, including (as St Augustine taught) even time itself. Hence, says Meister Eckhart, when we come to the Biblical statement “in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), we mustn’t think of this as a chronological or temporal starting-point, as if it referred to something which happened a long, long time ago, before the trilobites and dinosaurs. No, the beginning in question—*principium* in Latin and *archê* in Greek—refers instead to God Himself, the Supreme Principle. Actually, to be more specific (though I didn’t say this last time), it refers—according to Eckhart—to the Word or *Logos*, that is, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, by whom or through whom (according to the Gospel of John) “all things were made” (John 1:3). To say, therefore, that “in the beginning God created” is to say that *in Himself* He created, “inside” His *Logos*, and it follows from this (to use Ware’s term) that Christians may be called “pan-en-theists” (46) in their belief that *all* things have always existed *in God*. Every species of plant and animal and every kind of mineral, and all the human beings who have ever existed, and (beyond this tiny planet) all the galaxies and nebulae in the furthest reaches of the universe—all these things, “prior” to their emergence as material beings in time and space, “always” existed in the Divine *Logos* or Word.

Now something may be puzzling you here, I realize. As most of you probably know, the Biblical story of creation in Genesis 1 seems to present a very different picture from the one I’ve just sketched. It portrays creatures as coming into existence *successively* or *sequentially*, at different stages or moments of time. On Day One, God makes the light; on Day Two, He draws a line between the waters and the firmament; on Day Three, He makes plants; on Day Four, the sun and moon; on Day Five, fish and birds; and on Day Six, land animals and man. As Eckhart explains, there’s a good reason for this presentation in Genesis: “The things that God makes at the same time [actually in that eternal *now* which is “no-time”] cannot be expressed by us at one time” (64). And so, as a concession to the demands of our temporal consciousness, the creatures don’t appear all at once in the Genesis account, but rather in a sequential order or pattern. Nevertheless, this order, according to which the different species have been physically embodied one by one and over the course of many ages (symbolized in Genesis by the six

Days of creation), must *not* be confused with their original creation by God, which is a purely spiritual, eternal, and instantaneous act. In the words of Ecclesiasticus 18:1 (cited by Eckhart), “He who lives forever [that’s God, of course] created all things at the same time [*creavit omnia simul*]” (62).

In case you’re distrustful of a quotation from a book that’s omitted from the Protestant Old Testament, Genesis itself confirms the same teaching. Having gone through the familiar sequence of the six Days of creation in the first chapter, we come in the second chapter to a pair of verses that must surely surprise anybody who’s never heard of the distinctions we’re making here. Genesis 1 has spelled out what happened each Day, and then Genesis 2, having begun with God’s resting on the seventh Day, turns to what seems at first merely a brief recapitulation of the whole preceding process: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.... These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created [and now here comes the surprise] in the *Day* that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up” (Gen. 2:4-5). We’ve just been told that the creation took six *Days* (in the plural), but now we learn there was only one *Day* (in the singular) in which God had made everything—a day (please note) that was “prior” to the existence of the plants (the first of the terrestrial creatures), for there was “no plant of the field [that] was yet in the earth”.

Well, if you’re a Christian theologian like Eckhart or Ware, there’s no surprise and no problem here. You know that this passage in Genesis 2 is referring to the *supra-temporal* creation of things as they exist *within* the Divine Principle, whereas Genesis 1 is describing their *temporal* deployment or manifestation on earth. Here’s the way St Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330 - c. 395) puts it: “I understand the *beginning* of creation to mean two things: first that in a single instant God assembled the starting points and the causes and the qualities of all things, and second that at the first impulse of His will there was a confluence of the essence of each of the things that exists individually—heaven, ether, stars, fire, air, sea, earth, animals, plants. Each was perceived by the Divine eye, and each identified by the Word of His power, which ‘sees all things before they come into being’ [Daniel 13:42]. Without any interval of time, God’s work was joined with His will. At creation everything that is God’s, His will, His wisdom, His power, and the

individual existence of things, is conceived simultaneously” (“Apologetic Exposition of the Hexaemeron”). John Scotus Eriugena (810-877), a ninth century Christian philosopher, expresses the same point more succinctly: “All things were in God as causes before they were in themselves as effects” (“Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of John”). Or again, in words with which you’re already familiar from Ware, “We have always existed for Him [God]; creation [perhaps better “manifestation”] signifies that at a certain point in time we begin to exist also for ourselves” (45).

There’s obviously much more that could be said on this difficult, and profoundly important, subject. But I need to push on to another topic. I told you in my last lecture that, having sketched the cosmogonical essentials, we’d go on to explore the traditional Christian understanding of evil. It’s to this subject we need to turn now.

The first thing we must understand is that *evil is not itself a reality*. At first glance—well, maybe at second and third glances, too!—this proposition may seem a crazy thing to say. “What about murder and rape and birth defects and tsunamis and war?” you will ask. “How could anyone say they’re not real?” Bear with me for a moment, and give this some thought. As the Christian theologian sees it, though we naturally (and rightly) describe such things as “evil”, using the word as an adjective, there’s really no such “thing” as evil—no substance or force or entity that can legitimately go by that name. We may speak about an evil being (like Satan) or an evil act (like treason), but these strictly *adjectival* uses of the word don’t give us the right to suppose that evil as a *noun* can somehow exist on its own.

Ware quotes several traditional Christian authorities on this point, including Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa (both of whom we’ve met already), as well as Evagrius Ponticus (346-99) and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580 - 662), and he comes to the conclusion that “evil is always parasitic” (47). In other words, like a parasite that feeds on its host—like a tape-worm in the stomach of your dog—evil draws what seeming reality it has from its attachment to other things, things which in themselves are inevitably and intrinsically good. In yet another Latin phrase, theologians refer to evil in this “parasitic” sense as a *privatio boni*, that is, a “privation of goodness” or an “absence of goodness”. If you want an analogy, you could say that evil is to the good what a shadow is to sunlight. Just as the shadow is merely the absence of light, so evil is merely the absence of

goodness. After all, how much reality does a shadow have? How thick is it? It doesn't have any thickness. How much does it weigh? It doesn't have any weight. How do you pick it up? You can't pick it up. Similarly, evil doesn't have any substance. It's a privation or absence, and an *absence* is not a *something*. If I say that Jane is absent from class, her absence is not itself a reality, but the *lack* of that reality called "Jane". So also here: If I say that there is evil in the world, the evil is not itself a reality, but simply a lack of the goodness that should be there—or better: an apparent lack, resulting from our fallen and thus distorted perception, of the goodness that really *is* there. Hence as Ware says, evil "in the final analysis ... is illusion" (47).

Now be careful here. Calling evil an "illusion" is *not* the same thing as saying that there are no evils. Christian theologians are by no means claiming that bad things don't happen or that sin doesn't exist. An illusion, after all, is not the same as a *hallucination*. In hallucinating, we think things exist that aren't really there at all. If I started screaming and pointing to the corner of the room and telling you there was a bloodthirsty troll who was about to devour us all, you'd say, "Dr Cutsinger, please! You're hallucinating!" But in the case of an illusion, it's not a question of seeing something where *nothing* exists at all. Illusions are the result of seeing what truly *is* there, but in a way that's distorted or skewed. If I place a pencil in a glass of water, the pencil will appear to be bent, and we call that an optical illusion. There really is a glass, and there really is water, and there really is a pencil. The pencil is not, however, "really" bent; it itself remains straight, even though I see it otherwise, and we explain the illusion in terms of the refraction of the light by the water.

According to traditional Christian theology, the world around us is rather like the pencil in my example. Had we the eyes of God, we'd realize that it's just as straight as it ever was, but it appears to us now as if it were bent, and the name we give to that apparent bending is "evil". Ware has already introduced you to this basic concept. "All the things that exist are His [God's] creation," he writes, "whether in heaven or on earth, whether spiritual or physical, and so in their basic 'thusness' they are all of them good" (47). Notice, please, the tense of his verb. Speaking of God's creatures, Ware doesn't say that they *were* good, as if referring only to pre-Fall Eden, but that they *are* good. The sunshine and the apple trees and the birds and (yes) even the people are even now as they

were when God saw—in the words of Genesis—that each of them was “good” (Gen. 1:12, etc.). Once again we need to keep in mind the eternity of the act of creation: God *is* making them all even now: even as I write these words and you read them, all creatures are emerging afresh from His mind, and the result is just as *good* as ever.

So how come we don't see it that way? What about all this hatred and suffering and competition and death? Why are there cruelty and pain and wickedness? Why wars and natural disasters? Christianity answers these questions with its doctrine of the Fall. Man, though created by God in His image and likeness, and though endowed with a pain-free and paradisiacal existence, succumbed to temptation and “fell away” from this original perfection. When Christians talk about the Fall, they usually have in mind the Biblical narrative we find in Genesis, a story about the disobedience of the first human beings, Adam and Eve, who broke a Divine commandment not to eat of the fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (see Gen. 3:1-6). We may wish to come back to the details of the story and to the symbolism of this tree in class, but it's important to realize first, as Ware points out, that the Genesis narrative concerns only *one* of *two* falls: “There has been a double fall: first of the angels, and then of man. For Orthodoxy,” he continues—and what he says is just as true for other traditional Christians, both Roman Catholics and Protestants—“the fall of the angels is not a picturesque fairy-tale but spiritual truth. Prior to man's creation [given our new-found precision, we should perhaps say: “prior to the manifestation of man on this planet”], there had already occurred a parting of the ways within the noetic [that is, the angelic or spiritual] realm” (57). Our author goes on to clarify the implications of this teaching, which are three: first, that there are in the universe “forces of immense potency whose will is turned to evil” (58), a fact confirmed (he explains) in the spiritual struggles of the great ascetics; second, that even before terrestrial man's own rebellion, evil was already present on earth—this helps to account for the presence of the “serpent” in Eden (Gen. 3:1); and third, that evil originates from above not below, from spirit not matter. This of course serves to confirm once again that evil is not some physical or substantial thing, but rather the fancy of a deluded consciousness, resulting (Ware says) from “a wrong attitude towards what in itself is good” (58).

Something very important needs to be added here, though—something Ware only hints at. We need to state explicitly that the sorry state of the world has resulted, not just from a *double* fall, but from a *triple* fall. Prior to the fall of man on this planet (as described in Genesis 3), there was a fall of the angels in Heaven (see 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev. 12:9). But prior even to that angelic or noetic disruption, there was already a kind of “fall” in the very act of creation itself. The apparent existence of evil has resulted not just from a human fall, and not just from an angelic fall, but from a kind of cosmic, or perhaps metaphysical, fall as well. However odd or even blasphemous it may sound to say this, evil is ultimately the consequence—the *inevitable* consequence—of God’s own creative work.

Consider the reasons behind this undoubtedly surprising claim. God is good (see Mark 10:18, Luke 18:19)—though remember our earlier lessons in apophatic theology: His “good” isn’t necessarily the same as what we think of as good. Inasmuch as this good God creates the world, the world must in some sense be good as well. In fact He Himself says so five times in the narrative of Genesis 1. In verses 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25 we’re told that what God had made was “good”. And as if that weren’t enough, the chapter concludes with the words: “And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was *very* good” (Gen 1:31). So it’s clear, whatever else we might say, that creatures partake in some way of the goodness of God. Nevertheless (and now for a paradox), however good it might be, no creature can possibly reflect God’s goodness completely, for He is absolute and infinite, and creatures are relative and finite. To make the same point in different, more colloquial words: *God can’t clone Himself*. Here’s yet another instance where God is subject to certain restrictions resulting from His inescapable fidelity to the law of non-contradiction. God is the creator of all things, but no matter how hard He tries, He can’t create another being who is also the “creator-of-all-things”, for that creature *wouldn’t* be the creator of *God*, and therefore it *wouldn’t* be the creator-of-*all*. To use other words, God possesses the property of aseity—I mentioned this in Lecture 4—meaning that He’s “from Himself” alone. Obviously He can’t create a thing that has this same property, because it *wouldn’t* be “from itself” alone; it would be from *Him*. It follows from this line of thinking that the universe as God’s creature must in some sense be *less* than its Creator. Whatever God makes must be at a “lower” level than

He (symbolically speaking, of course, not spatially). And since He is *perfect*, the universe must in some sense be *imperfect*. In fact it must have been imperfect even “before” the fall of the angels and “before” the fall of men—even “before” Satan’s conversation with Eve, and “before” his own banishment from Heaven.

The idea of a cosmic or metaphysical fall is confirmed by Eckhart. “In creatures,” he writes, “nothing is perfect in every way” (65). For, he continues, “by the fact that anything is or has been created, it falls away from unity and simplicity. Unity and simplicity are proper to God and are His property.” Whatever is not one but divided, not simple but complex, is always to that extent “incorrect and faulty” (70). Most explicitly of all, Eckhart tells us that “the existence of evil is required by the perfection of the universe” (69). Why should that be so? Because the very existence of the created universe would be impossible were it not for a certain inherent deficiency that serves to distinguish it from God. We find the same teaching in the works of St Irenaeus, the second century Church father who referred to the Son and the Spirit as the Father’s two hands. “Created things ... must be inferior to Him who made them,” says Irenaeus. “It is an impossibility that things created should be at the same time uncreated. Inasmuch as they are not uncreated, it follows that they are inferior to what is perfect” (*Against Heresies*, 4.38.1).

Now understand this please: the inevitable lack of goodness in creatures should *not* be confused or equated with that actual perversion or distortion of things which resulted from the other two falls: that is, from the angelic and human rebellions. To speak of a “fall” in the created order as such is not intended to take Satan and man off the hook. It’s not meant to excuse them for their conscious misuse of their God-given freedom. Ware goes to great lengths in stressing that the fall of man was the result of a “*deliberate* rejection of God’s love, a *freely-chosen* turning from God to self” (58), and I don’t mean to diminish the truth of this statement. Deliberately using an anthropomorphic formulation, he speaks about God taking a “risk” in endowing man with free-will (59), and it’s perfectly legitimate to trace all the sin and suffering of our world to the abuse of that freedom. And yet from another, equally legitimate point of view, we may also say—putting the matter in an equally anthropomorphic manner—that God “took a risk” in making the universe in the first place, not just in giving the power of choice to certain

classes of creatures within that universe. For no matter how good He might make it, a creature can never comprehend in itself total goodness. By its very nature it must exclude certain qualities that are otherwise good. The very best possible rose may be “very good” at being a flower. It may have an exquisitely beautiful shape, a delightful fragrance, a brilliant color. But precisely because it’s a flower, it necessarily lacks certain other good qualities and virtues. It can’t, for example, run as fast as a cheetah. This sounds silly, I realize, but my point is simply that in their very goodness, creatures must exist in a sense at each other’s expense. And it’s not hard to see here the seeds of conflict.

Flowers and cheetahs, presumably, don’t envy each other. They’re content to be themselves: the flower doesn’t worry about not being able to run, and the cheetah could care less about smelling good. But among the other creatures of God are the angels and men, and among their defining features there’s something called “consciousness” and something called “freedom”. Consciousness allows these creatures to be aware of themselves, and aware of their environments, and thus (by comparison) aware of their limits. And to be aware of your limits is to be aware in turn that other creatures have virtues and powers you lack. As for their freedom, this is what allows angelic and human creatures to transform their awareness into action, seeking to acquire what they perceive themselves to lack. It’s very easy to imagine how an angel or a man might go from thinking: “I see you’re different from me; how nice for you!” to thinking “I see you’re different from me, and the difference you’ve got I want!” Now certainly the transition from the first response to the second remains the responsibility of the creature alone. God is not to be blamed, or not directly at least, for angelic or human envy and greed. On the other hand, had it not been for the initial differentiation of goods between creatures—had there been no partitioning, as it were, of the Divine simplicity—the sinful reactions of rational creatures would never have been possible.

The Anglican theological writer Charles Williams (1886-1945), a close friend of C. S. Lewis’s, makes the same point this way: “Omnipotence contemplated pain and created; that is, He brought its possibility—and its actuality—into existence. Without Him it could not have been; and calling it His permission instead of His will may be intellectually accurate, but does not seem to get over the fact that if the First Cause has power, intelligence, and will to cause a universe to exist, then He is the First Cause of it.

The First Cause cannot escape being the First Cause. God only is God. The pious have been—as they always are—too anxious to excuse Him; the prophet was wiser: ‘I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things’ (*He Came Down from Heaven*, 98-99; the Biblical quotation is from Isa. 45:7).

Well, putting all these observations together, we have at least the lineaments of a Christian theodicy, that is, a solution to the problem of evil. Why is there suffering? Why is there corruption and decay? Why all the pain, and friction, and disasters of life?

When you count up the various answers that have been given to these questions by philosophers and religious authorities, they can be sorted into *five* major kinds or categories. Two of these forms of theodicy are incompatible with Christianity, namely, “relativism” and “dualism”.

1. *Relativists* try to solve the problem of evil by arguing that our use of the term *evil* is simply a way of expressing dislike. I call something “evil” that I don’t like or don’t want, and “good” what I do like and do want. Reality in itself, according to this view of things, is neither good nor evil, but neutral, and man’s descriptive terms are therefore purely relative and subjective. Thus one solves the problem of evil by saying in effect that there’s really no problem. Christian theologians reject this approach. Evil may well be an illusion, but that doesn’t mean that it’s without objective effects or consequences, nor can the Christian ignore the fact that the God of the Bible is Himself aware of evil and—unsurprisingly—opposed to it. As Ware writes, “To say that evil is the perversion of good ... is not to deny its powerful hold over us” (47).

2. According to *dualists*, the existence of evil is proof that there are two different gods, one good and one bad, fighting for supremacy in the universe. When bad things happen to good people, it’s because the bad god has had a good day. As Ware mentions in our book (46), an ancient sect called the Manichaeans held this dualistic point of view, and it’s also associated with the Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. But once again it’s never been a real option for Christians, for the obvious reason that Christians are *monotheists*. They believe in only one Divinity, who has no peer. “Against dualism in all its forms,” comments Ware, “Christianity affirms that there is a *summum bonum*, a ‘supreme good’—namely, God Himself—but there is and can be no *summum malum*. Evil is not coeternal with God” (46-47).

Having dismissed these first two explanations of evil, theologians have traditionally opted for one or more of three additional theodicies, namely, the Augustinian, the Irenaean, and the Origenist—so named after three Church fathers who gave them prominence. Two of these we’ve already heard from: St Irenaeus and St Augustine. The third is Origen (*c.* 185 - *c.* 254), the most prolific by far of all early Christian authorities.

3. The *Irenaean* solution puts its stress on the fact that God is the Ultimate Source of all things—the “First Cause”, as Charles William points out. This being so, the Divine must in some sense be the cause of evil as well. St Irenaeus and his successors tend to think of evil primarily in terms of “testing” or “challenge”. Obviously God’s aim, since He’s goodness itself, is not to hurt His creatures. He’s not some sort of cosmic sadist. On the other hand, like any good parent, He knows how important it is for His children to grow in maturity and self-confidence, and He also knows that such growth requires in turn that they confront suffering and pain. To shift the metaphor, the world is a school, and God is a teacher, whose main goal is *not* making people happy but instead helping them develop and mature.

4. Of course, no teacher can succeed in his aims if his students don’t cooperate. In God’s school, too, people must be willing to work at their assignments, and if and when they fail, they can’t simply put the blame on their teacher. Here’s where the *Augustinian* theodicy comes in, for it emphasizes angelic and human freedom as the cause of evil. St Augustine taught that the source of disease and war and death and all forms of suffering can be traced back to the Fall, which was brought about when man *willingly* succumbed to the temptation of Satan, who had himself *willed* to rebel against God. Evil is thus rooted in an abuse of free choice that occurred very near the dawn of time. In the Augustinian perspective, the “bad fruit” or the “curse” of this primal abuse has been passed down through the centuries in the form of original sin. Every human being without exception, by the very fact of his being conceived by sinful parents, has inherited the guilt of Adam and Eve and is thus “born in sin”. Since everyone is guilty of sin, everyone is deserving of punishment. Evil, whatever form it may take, *is* that punishment.

5. Finally, the *Origenist* theodicy is distinguished by the fact that it locates the principal reason for evil, not in God as the First Cause of the universe and not in Satan and men as the “first abusers” of freedom, but rather in what I described earlier in this lecture as the inevitable, metaphysical imperfection of creatures. The shorthand version of this point of view is to say that “matter” is evil, all suffering and pain having resulted from our mistaken belief that physical things are the primary “reality” and that they can give us true happiness. Not surprisingly, this perspective is sometimes confused with the ancient heresy of Gnosticism, which taught that matter *per se* is an evil “substance”, created by a false god for the imprisonment of the true God’s purely spiritual creatures. Neither Origen nor his legitimate successors, however, meant to say this. “Matter” in their teaching is not physical stuff as such, but rather a name for the “distance”, if you will, separating Absolute Being from contingent or relative being. “Matter”, in other words, is the name that the Origenist gives to the unavoidable imperfection of things—to the fact, which we pointed out earlier, that God “can’t clone Himself”.

We’ll discuss these theodicies further in class, but as I hope you can see even now, they’re by no means mutually exclusive explanations of evil. They’re accentuations of different aspects of the problem, and any truly adequate Christian solution will in some way attempt to combine them.

**Lecture 11:**  
**Man as Microcosm**

Last time our focus was the problem of evil. I began by explaining that from the traditional Christian point of view evil is an illusion, not a reality. This doesn't mean that evil has no power or that there is no such thing as sin. Christians are not "relativists"; they do not suppose reality is a purely neutral affair and that goodness and badness are a matter of human opinion alone. On the contrary, reality is good. Streaming forth in every instant from God the Creator, it's indeed *very* good. The problem, however, is that fallen man fails to perceive that goodness. What he apprehends instead is a *privatio boni* or privation of goodness, and it's from this privation or absence that all the sin and sickness and misery and death of our world are derived. As Charles Williams once observed, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil might be very fittingly renamed the Tree of the Knowledge of Good *as* Evil, for in partaking of its fruit man's consciousness was altered, and he was no longer able to see things truly—no longer able to see how they appear in God's sight.

But how did this happen? How did things get to be this way in the first place? A dramatic story about a tree and a garden is fine, but what does it mean? As discussed in our last class, Christian theologians have proposed three basic answers to this question, three theodicies or explanations of evil. There's the Irenaean view, which says that evil is God's way of testing and challenging us for the sake of our spiritual growth in the *future*; the Augustinian position, which says that evil is punishment for a misuse of free will in the *past*; and the Origenist answer, which stresses that evil has to do with our misperception of things in the *present* and which contends that this misperception results from matter ("matter" here meaning not physical substance itself, but the "distance" between creatures and God—whatever it is that's not God in whatever it is that exists).

These three theodicies are not of course mutually exclusive—or at least they needn't be. They can be approached instead as complementary ways of looking at the total situation. The Irenaean perspective is obviously right in proposing that whatever else we might say about evil, it would never have existed in the first place were it not for God, for God after all is Himself the First Cause and thus the Cause of the other two

causes, namely, matter and freedom. In creating the world, He created something that's inevitably inferior to Himself, and this we call matter. Meanwhile, in creating angels and men, He created free will, knowing full well its potential for abuse and rebellion. This is by no means to say, however, that God is solely responsible. With the exception of some of the Protestant Reformers, notably John Calvin and his followers, the vast majority of Christians have taught instead that creatures have at least a share of the responsibility for the evil around them. There was nothing (most Christians would say) *forcing* the rebellion of Satan and the other fallen angels, nor did Satan's presence in Eden *necessitate* the sin of the first human beings. No one, therefore, can excuse himself simply by saying, "The Devil made me do it"; and the Devil in turn can't say that God made *him* do it. These were free acts of free creatures, and to *that* extent God is perfectly justified in bringing these creatures to account for what they have done. Western theologians, beginning with St Augustine, have tended to picture this accounting in legalistic and juridical terms, as if God were a judge in a heavenly courtroom. But there's nothing to prevent those who are dissatisfied with the anthropomorphism of this image from nonetheless admitting its central truth, namely, that choices have consequences. Were it not for God, there would be no such thing as chocolate, nor would there be me and my appetite. And were I not deluded by the seeming heaviness and opacity of matter into thinking that chocolate is a kind of end in itself, I would never eat enough of it to make myself sick. Nevertheless, when I *do* eat half a cake or a dozen brownies at one sitting and end up with a bellyache, it remains the case—God and matter notwithstanding—that I have nobody to blame but *myself*. Herein, says the Tradition, lies the full truth of our fallenness.

But now I need to shift gears. Having looked at traditional Christian views of the Creation and Fall, it's time today to turn our attention to the implications of these two doctrines for our understanding of the human being. We must turn—to remind you of the technical theological terms—from *cosmogony* to *anthropology* and from *theodicy* to *hamartiology*. This means focusing on Roman numeral II of our outline. We want to understand, on the one hand, what Christians believe about the state in which Man was first created by God (II.A. of the outline) and, on the other hand, what they believe about Man as he now exists as the result of the Fall (II.B. of the outline). The word for fall in

Latin is *lapsus*, whence comes our word “lapse”; and with this in mind theologians distinguish between the “pre-fallen” and “post-fallen” conditions of existence with the technical terms *supralapsarian* and *infralapsarian*. Before the Fall—literally, “above” the Fall—man existed in a *supralapsarian* state, and after the Fall—literally, “below” the Fall—man exists now in an *infralapsarian* state. So what exactly is the difference? What’s the difference between supra- and infralapsarian humanity?

Originally, says the Christian Tradition, when man first appeared on earth, he existed in an Edenic or paradisiacal state, with no suffering, no pain, no disease, and no death. Here different theologians and different schools of Christian thought will sometimes say different things. A few of the early Church fathers believed that the very substance of man’s body was at first different from ours today; some in fact said he didn’t as yet even have a body as we know it. (Take a look at Gen. 3:21 and consider its implications in this light.) Other Christian authorities have suggested that the first human being was androgynous. *Adam* is not a proper name in Hebrew, but a generic term meaning “mankind” or “humanity”, so there’s nothing necessarily male about the name. But whether or not one agrees with these speculations, *all* Christians believe that supralapsarian human beings were superior to ourselves. Man had been created by God *in* His image and *for* his likeness—to make use of the distinction Ware speaks about in our book—and this meant among other things that man was superior to all the rest of God’s creatures and that it was man’s vocation and responsibility to rule over the world. In the language of Genesis, man was to have “dominion” (Gen. 1:26) over the animals and was responsible for “subduing” (Gen. 1:28) the earth. When Jesus walked on water and calmed storms, these miracles needn’t be taken simply as signs of His Divinity; they’re also marks of His unfallen humanity, for these were precisely the kind of prodigious powers with which man himself was originally endowed—modern Biblical critics notwithstanding! This may surprise you, but the following words of Christ, spoken in reference to Himself, could also be said to be true in reference to supralapsarian Adam and Eve: “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). For man was meant to be for the rest of creation what God Himself was for man. As Ware notes, man was to be a mediator (50), a priest, and a king (53-55).

Man of all creatures was uniquely capable of fulfilling this vocation because his nature is composite or compound. He shares on the one hand in the distinctive attributes of the noetic or spiritual world of the angels while at the same time participating on the other hand in the material and biological world of the plants and animals. Man is thus a microcosm (49) or little universe, an *imago mundi* or “image of the world” (49), containing, on a miniature scale, every kind of thing existing in the universe at large. Ware quotes Origen at the start of the chapter: “Understand that you have within yourself, upon a small scale, a second universe: within you there is a sun, there is a moon, and there are also stars” (43). It’s for this reason, as our author points out, that man may be said to have been originally even greater than the angels. From one point of view, the angels are superior to man insofar as they’re purely immaterial or incorporeal beings, whose spiritual mode of existence places them closer to the Divine level of being. And of course there’s also this to be said, that the good angels, those who refused to follow Satan in his rebellion, have remained *morally* superior to fallen man. In these two senses we must look upon them as our betters. But from another standpoint, man is superior to the angels in what might be called his constitutional comprehensiveness, and hence in his capacity to serve as a bridge or pontifex between God and the rest of creation. “Our human nature,” writes Ware, “is thus more complex than the angelic, and endowed with richer potentialities. Viewed in this perspective, man is not lower but higher than the angels ... [for] all created things have their meeting place in him” (49).

This idea of man as a microcosm is not explicitly Biblical, but it follows directly from one very significant fact about the creation story in Genesis. Genesis describes each of the various plants and animals as having been made “according to its kind” (Gen. 1:12, *etc.*), that is, in a way that reflected or copied some pre-existing paradigm, model, or archetype: there was “roseness” for the roses, and “cheetahness” for the cheetahs, and so forth and so on. But in the case of man, there’s no mention of any particular “kind”. The implication instead is that having been created in the image of *God*, man has God Himself for his “kind” or archetype. And God—here’s the point—is not just some given archetype or possibility. Rather He’s the one in whom *all* possibilities, *all* models, *all* archetypes inhere. A fifteenth century Christian writer, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94)—in a famous work entitled “An Oration on the Dignity of Man”—imagines

the scenario when God was creating the world, and he considers (just a bit tongue-in-cheek!) what might have happened if God, having first manifested all His other creative ideas, had found Himself at a loss as to what to give man as the last of His creatures to be expressed in time. Everything had in a sense been used up, so what was God to do now? I'll give you Pico's answer in class.

In any case, the basic point that needs stressing here is simply the complexity or comprehensiveness of the human being. But what exactly does that complexity contain? I've said that the Christian sees man as embracing both the spiritual and the material worlds, but in fact we need to revise or expand that picture somewhat. As Ware explains, the idea of man as combining *two* worlds or *two* planes of being is not quite sufficient. It turns out instead that in the Christian perspective, man is understood as containing not just *two* levels but *three*. He's ternary or tripartite in his basic structure, and not merely dual. And if we think back to our earlier reading from St Augustine, this isn't terribly surprising, since man after all is made in the image of the Trinity.

The classic Biblical expression of this three-fold constitution of the human being can be found in St Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians. The verse in question takes the form of a prayer. "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly," Paul writes, "and may your *spirit and soul and body* be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). As Ware points out, Christians have sometimes treated the words *spirit* and *soul* as if they were synonyms, and sometimes the spirit has been conceived of as a part of the soul. Nevertheless, the parallel conjunctions in the passage have suggested to most interpreters that these are to be understood as distinct parts of man's nature: the phrase "*spirit and soul and body*" implies that the spirit is not the same as the soul, any more than the soul is the same as the body. And just in case this isn't clear enough, there's an important scriptural support for this interpretation in Hebrew 4:12, where we read that "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of *soul and spirit*". Clearly if there's a *division* between the soul and the spirit, they can't be the same thing. On the other hand, it's not so very surprising that people have confused the two and have had a difficult time discerning in precisely what the difference consists, for as the Tradition sees it, one very important result of the Fall (as we'll see momentarily) has been the occlusion or eclipsing

of the spirit in man. “Most people,” says Ware, “are not even aware that they possess a [spirit]” (48), and he goes on to observe that “modern man has for the most part lost touch with the truest and highest aspect of himself” (49). This “truest” and “highest” aspect is precisely our spirit.

In view of these considerations, man is best understood as a union of three distinct parts. Starting as it were at the bottom of our being, we’re aware first of the *body* (*soma* in Greek). The body is our most obvious “part”. It’s the seat of our five natural senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling), and it’s the part that interacts with the physical world: breathing, processing food, taking up space. Ascending one level, we come next to the *soul*. The soul is somewhat less obvious, at least to the outsider observer. Indeed there are many modern scientists and philosophers who think there’s no such thing as a soul, since it’s not susceptible to any empirical or scientific measurement. We can know our own souls from the “inside out”, as it were, but we don’t see the souls of others, or not at least directly. The Greek term in this case is *psyche*—whence the English “psychology” and its cognates—a term that refers literally to the “motive force” behind any change or transformation. For the ancient Greeks, humans weren’t the only beings with souls. An animal or a plant could also be said to have a *psyche*. In an animal the soul is the principle of sentience or awareness as well as the power behind locomotion, whereas in a plant the soul is responsible for such processes as photosynthesis, and it’s what causes a plant to turn toward the sun. Aristotle goes so far as to say that even a mineral with magnetic properties like a lodestone has a “soul”, which is what causes the movement of iron in its direction. Because of his microcosmic complexity, man may be described as having more than one soul, or if this is too strange a way of speaking, perhaps we could say instead that his soul is able to perform multiple functions. It’s what runs your autonomic nervous system, for example, beating your heart and digesting your food, operations which are similar to those that take place in a plant. The soul is also what moves your body from place to place, and it’s responsible for your powers of perception, in these respects being like the soul of an animal.

But in the case of a man, the soul has further responsibilities as well, certain specifically human powers or purposes. Among the pre-Christian philosophers, Plato (*c.* 427 - *c.* 347 B.C.) distinguished three such functions, and many of the Church Fathers,

especially in the East, borrowed his psychology. First, the human soul is what makes it possible for you to organize your perceptions by means of concepts and categories, to take stock of general principles, and to reason from premises to conclusions. It thus includes what we usually call in English the *mind*. Second, your soul is what allows you to make decisions, to make responsible choices between alternatives, and it thus includes what we refer to as the *will*. Third, and finally, the human soul is what enables you to have feelings, to experience the whole gamut of moods or psychic states ranging from love to hatred, from joy to sadness, from confidence to fear, and it thus includes also what we mean by *emotions*. (For those who've studied some Greek, I might point out that the "mind" corresponds to *logistikon*, the "will" to *thymos*, and the "emotions" to *epithymia*, these being the standard terms used by Plato in his *Republic* to describe the various aspects of the soul.) So summing up we could say that the soul is the union or confluence of mind, will, and emotions. There's an intellective, a volitive, and an affective aspect to the human psyche.

But that's not all there is to a human being. Ascending yet another level, above and beyond both the body and soul, there's a third dimension, and this is our spirit, *pneuma* in Greek, also sometimes referred to by Greek-speaking fathers as the *nous* or "spiritual intellect". As you know, Ware goes to some lengths in describing this most elusive and mysterious aspect of man. Perhaps the first thing to stress is that it's this pneumatic or noetic part of a person that allows him to share, at least in principle, in the life of the angels. Even as our physical senses permit us to have contact with the physical world, so also the *pneuma* or *nous* gives us the power or potentiality for contact with the spiritual world—however dormant or latent this power may be in most people today. When a modern parapsychologist describes such phenomena as extrasensory perception, clairvoyance, telepathy, psychokinesis, or precognition, these would be understood traditionally as intimations of the spiritual aspect of man on the plane of the soul.

To come at the matter in less functional and more constitutive terms, we could say furthermore that the spirit is the presence of God in a person. As Ware stresses, it would be a mistake to equate man's spirit (with a small "s") and the Holy Spirit (with a capital "S"). Nonetheless, there's a very close relationship between them, and in the case of someone who has been entirely sanctified or deified—who has, in the language of the

Christian East, “acquired the Holy Spirit”—the distinction collapses into a virtual identity. Even for the rest of us, however, it may be said that the spirit or the spiritual intellect is intrinsically Divine in some sense. There is something in man, said Meister Eckhart, which is *incretatus et increabile* (uncreated and uncreatable), and this something is the human spirit precisely. Yet another way of getting at this elusive part of the self is to describe it as the root or source of our knowledge. It’s what does the knowing when you engage in introspection. You turn your mind inward and observe your moods, expectations, dreams, ambitions, talents, and tendencies—in short all the myriad contents of your conscious and unconscious life. But your spirit is not itself any one of those contents. It’s instead the container. It’s what’s always doing the looking, *not* something you can ever look *at*. When Augustine distinguished between the mind, the mind’s knowledge of itself, and the mind’s love of itself, back in our discussions of the Trinity, he was using his *spirit* to make the distinction. If you had a hard time following him, that’s just further confirmation as to how elusive this highest part of ourselves really is.

There’s one final way in which the soul and the spirit may be said to differ: the soul is *individual* and *personal*, whereas the spirit must be regarded as in some sense *supra-individual* and *trans-personal*. In other words, your soul pertains to what makes “you” the unique person you are. No two souls are the same. Every soul has its own idiosyncrasy—that is, its own particular configuration of personality, temperament, memories, and talents—and it therefore thinks, chooses, and feels in a way all its own. By contrast, your spirit is on a level higher than this. In fact, from the traditional Christian point of view, it might be better not even to speak of “your” spirit, as if it were some sort of property or possession that belongs to you personally. In a sense, the truth is just the reverse. *You* belong to your *spirit*. All of the particularities that I’ve just described, all the things that go to make up your present uniqueness, are the manifestations in time and space of the spirit’s own independent and eternal reality.

I’ll leave things there for the moment, but in class I plan to show you some diagrams which should help to clarify the relationship among these various parts of the human microcosm and which will serve to highlight the essential differences between supralapsarian and infralapsarian human existence—between man before the Fall and man after the Fall.

## Lecture 12: The Logic of Nicaea

Today we begin our discussions of the fourth chapter of *The Orthodox Way*, “God as Man”. As always, I’ve provided some supplementary materials in the Reader that will enhance your study of the book, and they include in this case selections from St Athanasius, St Leo the Great (d. 461), and the usual St (!) C. S. Lewis. You should also look carefully at the Appendix to the Reader (212-224). There you will find “A Sampling of New Testament Christology” as well as several important creeds from the early Church. These materials are crucial in coming to grips with what the Christian Tradition means when it tells us that Jesus Christ is both God and man.

In my last lecture, our discussion was focused on anthropology and hamartiology as we examined the Christian doctrine of man. I began by stressing how radically different were the first human beings from us—or rather (to be more precise) how different they were from how we *seem* to ourselves, remembering as always that our consciousness after the Fall is deluded and that the *real* world (like a pencil in a glass of water) is just as “straight” as it’s always been. Given, however, the way things appear to us now, we’d have to say that the physical and mental powers of unfallen man, his relationship with God and with the rest of creation, and even the quality of his body were beyond our own present experience, like nothing we’ve ever seen in our lives. If *we’re* human—if it’s legitimate to call ourselves human beings—then the first people (Adam and Eve in the Bible) must have been superhuman. Alternatively, if *they* were human, then we today are subhuman. It’s not enough simply to say that supralapsarian man was innocent while infralapsarian man is a sinner. This of course is true, and no Christian would wish to downplay this crucial moral difference. But more than that, there’s an *ontological* difference—a difference in the very structure and ways of being of these two sorts of “humans”.

To give you some sense of this difference, I compared and contrasted the pre-fallen and post-fallen human states in light of their constitutive parts. Following the lead of St Paul, we noted that man is a microcosm or miniature universe containing three distinct levels: the body, the soul, and the spirit. I defined and described these three

levels, pointing out that the soul itself is complex—that it includes our powers of thinking, choosing, and feeling, thus embracing what we mean by the mind, the will, and the emotions. With these several distinctions in mind, I showed you a diagram in class in which I attempted to indicate the relative “positions” and “qualities” of these basic parts in both supralapsarian and infralapsarian man. What we noticed above all was that fallen man has lost touch with his spiritual part and that an inversion or reversal has taken place in the rest of his self, with the original, God-given hierarchy of mind, will, emotions, and body in the *unfallen* self being overturned in the structure of the *fallen* self.

According to the Christian Tradition, this is just what we should expect, given the parallelism between the inner and the outer worlds, between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Just as man’s rebellion against God as his rightful Ruler and Lord resulted *macrocosmically* in man’s losing control of the rest of creation, over which he’d been given dominion, so the soul’s rebellion against the spirit has resulted *microcosmically* in man’s losing control over his body and in his becoming subject to pain, disease, and death. The external rebellion of man against God was at the same time an internal rebellion of the personal against the transpersonal dimension within man himself. For things were divinely ordained in such a way that man can rule the earth and be the “priest and king” (Ware, 53) that he was intended to be only through his submission to God, while similarly, within the human being, things were so structured that the soul can govern the body only through its submission to the rule of the spirit. As soon as man attempts to go it alone without reference to God, the creation that had been his subject rebels and becomes his master, and the result (among other things) is that man must now work “by the sweat of his brow” (Gen. 3:19) and woman must now bear “pain in childbearing” (Gen. 3:16). Meanwhile, as soon as the soul tries to go it alone without reference to the spirit, the body that had been the soul’s subject rebels and becomes *its* master, and the result is the ignorant, intemperate, and obsequious behavior we’re all too familiar with in ourselves. This, in essence, is what it means to be a fallen man.

As we embark now on a discussion of Christian teaching about Jesus Christ, we’re turning to the next logical question a systematic theologian must raise: the question of what must be *done* to *undo* this fallen condition, what needs to happen if we’re to escape from this mess, from this disordered existence. Given the upside-down situation of

fallen man and all the dolorous consequences that have followed from it—given, in other words, the problem of evil—are there any means of correction or resolution? Is there any way of reversing the effects of the Fall and restoring man, and through him the entire rest of creation, to their proper relationship with God? Christians believe the answer to this question is a decisive and definitive *Yes*. There *is* something that can be done, and the One who can do it is the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Through Him infralapsarian man has been given the power to return at least to the level of his supralapsarian state. (Why “at least”? I’ll return to that phrase later on.)

I explained some time ago that the point of systematic theology is to understand how III.A. transforms II.B. back into II.A. by repeating I.B., and how this in turn demonstrates that III.B is I.A. To translate this formula once again into plain English: Christian faith in Jesus Christ is based in the first place upon the impact of His life and work. It’s based on the conviction, in other words, that Christ acted in such a way as to make possible a return to man’s original state of being. This is what Christians mean when they refer to Jesus as their “savior”. Because of Him, a great instauration has begun: fallen man has recovered his unfallen powers and capacities—in principle, though for most of us not yet in fact. The possibility of wisdom has been restored to the mind, the possibility of governance has been restored to the will, the possibility of temperance has been restored to the emotions, and the possibility of immortality has been restored to the body. But—and now comes, please note, *the* crucial deduction of the whole Christian religion, the fundamental claim of this sacred Tradition—none of this would have happened unless Jesus Christ was *both* God *and* man. Only by *being* the God-Man could His *acting* have had these effects. Only if there was an *incarnation* of God could there also have been a *salvation* of man.

But I’m getting ahead of the story (yet again) and making what is already a very difficult doctrine even more difficult by compressing it too much. Before tackling the question of how the “God-Man” fits into the overall scheme of theology, we need to slow down and be as clear as possible about what basic Christian teaching is on this point. The words I’ve been using so far—incarnation, salvation, *etc.*—are so familiar to Christians that they tend just to take their meanings for granted. In my experience, however, many believers, even serious ones, are just mouthing the words without having wrestled with

the deep issues. After all, the central claim that we're dealing with here—that “God became man”—is nothing short of mind-boggling. So we need to pause to ask ourselves carefully what exactly it means. What exactly is being claimed in this doctrine?

In order to understand what Christians teach about Jesus Christ, we must move ahead cautiously, avoiding four different pitfalls. The Madhyamaka Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna (c. 150 - 250), in an effort to express the ultimate mystery of *Nirvana*—which (to put the matter very simplistically) is the Buddhist word for Heaven—made use of a logical puzzle called a *tetralemma*. You all know what a *dilemma* is: it's where you're caught between two positions which are equally desirable or equally valuable, but which appear to be mutually exclusive—stuck, as we say, between “the rock and the hard place”. Well, Nagarjuna raises the difficulty of the usual dilemma from a factor of two to a factor of four. According to his *tetralemma*, *Nirvana* (1) doesn't exist, (2) nor does it not exist, (3) nor is it the case that it neither exists nor doesn't exist, (4) nor does it both exist and not exist. *Nirvana*, he says, is whatever's left. Some of you may be thinking, I realize, that this is all a bunch of useless hairsplitting, just the sort of thing a philosopher might say! Be careful, though, because in fact this is precisely what the Christian religion says about Jesus Christ. Christ, like the Buddhist *Nirvana*, somehow exists “in between” the four prongs of a tetralemma. Jesus Christ, says the Christian, is (1) not just a man; a first error would be to think He's solely human, someone just like the rest of us. (2) Nor, however, is He just God; a second error would be to think He's solely Divine. (3) Nor is He *neither* man *nor* God; a third error would be to think He's an intermediate being, below the Divine but above the human. (4) Nor—be careful here: this is very tricky because it's very tempting—is He a *combination* of God *and* man; yet a fourth error would be to think Christ is some kind of “alloy”, “hybrid”, or “synthesis”, the result of blending two distinct modes of being, part God and part man. Well, when you've put to one side all these erroneous possibilities, Christ—according to the traditional Christian doctrine of the Incarnation—is “whatever's left”! He's not human without being Divine, nor is He is Divine without being human, nor is He neither human nor Divine, nor is He a synthesis of the Divine and the human.

So then what *is* He, you ask? What is it that's left? According to the Tradition, what's left is the mystery of the “two natures”. Christ, says the Christian, is one Person

who exists in two natures. The word “nature” is a technical theological term in this context, and it refers to the essential or distinguishing qualities that make a given thing what it is. It’s in the very nature of a triangle, for example, to have three sides; or again, man is by nature a rational animal. In Christ there are *two* such natures, two sets of distinguishing properties: one of these natures is human, and the other is Divine. While Christ is *not* solely human, He *is* entirely human (and not just partly so); He’s *entirely* human in the sense that He possesses all the essential properties or qualities of other men and women. Similarly, while He’s *not* solely Divine, He *is* entirely Divine (and not just partly so); He’s *entirely* Divine inasmuch as He shares completely in all the properties and qualities proper to God. Moreover—and this is the real mind-boggler—He’s both of these things, both *entirely* human and *entirely* Divine, at one and the same time. In the words of the *Quicumque Vult* or Athanasian Creed, which we looked at earlier in our discussions of the Trinity, Christ is “Perfect God, and Perfect Man” (Reader, 223). Or again, in the more elaborate statement that we find in the Definition of Chalcedon, which we’ll discuss fully later, He is “truly God and truly man ... of the same substance [or essence] as the Father as to His Godhead [or Divinity], and of the same substance [or essence] as we are ourselves as to His manhood” (Reader, 221). Ware puts it this way: “The Christian doctrine of our salvation demands that we shall be maximalists. We are not to think of Him [Christ] as ‘half-in-half’. Jesus Christ is not fifty per cent God and fifty per cent man, but one hundred per cent God and one hundred per cent man. In the epigrammatic phrase of St Leo the Great, he is *totus in suis, totus in nostris*, ‘complete in what is His own, complete in what is ours’” (73).

Ware highlights some of the finer shades of this teaching in a section of the chapter called “Twofold yet One”, and he speaks at some length in so doing about a series of conferences that were held in the early centuries of Christian history. We refer to them as Ecumenical Councils. (The adjective “ecumenical” comes from a Greek word meaning the “inhabited world”. These meetings are called *ecumenical* because invitations to participate went out to Church leaders throughout the Roman Empire—considered, by those involved, to embrace the whole “civilized” world of the time—and because their decisions were accepted and approved by the whole Church.) I’ve mentioned these councils in passing two or three times already this semester. What we’re talking about is

a series of seven crucial meetings that were convened over the course of about four hundred years, ranging from the fourth to the eighth centuries A.D.—meetings that were absolutely decisive in giving precise verbal form to the Christian understanding of Christ. For our purposes in this class, the most important of these councils were the first four, which met in four different cities of Asia Minor, roughly present-day Turkey: namely, Nicaea (in 325 A.D.), Constantinople (in 381 A.D.), Ephesus (in 431 A.D.), and Chalcedon (in 451 A.D.).

The systematic theologian doesn't usually concern himself with the ins and outs of Church history or the history of doctrine. When it comes to these councils, he usually just takes their decisions for granted without spending much time looking into all the complicated issues of why they were called and who said what, when, to whom, or for what reason. Nevertheless, in the interest of giving you at least a taste of what happened, I want to spend a few minutes sketching a little of the background and describing some of the proceedings of the first of these meetings, the Council of Nicaea. A quick peek at a few of the details will be of help in appreciating how important these councils were in determining what Christians today believe and teach about the Incarnation. It's easy for the layman, perhaps especially the conservative Protestant layman, to suppose that the doctrine of the Incarnation is simply there for the asking in the pages of Scripture. After all these many centuries, one assumes that a belief in Christ as the God-Man is somehow assured or guaranteed by the Bible. But in fact that's not so, or not at least so easily or simply so as you might otherwise think. Here on the contrary, as with the doctrine of the Trinity, we come to one of those cases where the theologian depends on the witness of a larger Tradition including, but not limited to, the Bible alone—a Tradition that features symbols and sacraments and liturgical prayers and icons *and* the official decisions of these Ecumenical Councils.

To understand what occurred at Nicaea, we need to back up a few years, to around 318 A.D., and we need to look specifically at what was happening in the Egyptian port city of Alexandria. Here there lived a prominent and relatively popular Christian priest named Arius (*c.* 250 - *c.* 336), widely known for his rhetorical skills and pastoral energy. It isn't for his homiletical or fund-raising talents that we know him today, however, but because of what he said about Christ. Had we plenty of time, there are

many subtleties we might wish to go into, but basically—to cut to the heart of the matter—Arius taught that Jesus Christ was *not* Divine, that He was *not* in fact the incarnation of God. Now mind you, Arius considered himself a faithful Christian. From all we can tell he believed Jesus was the promised Messiah or Christ as well as the Son and Word of God, and he believed that Jesus had been sent into the world as man’s Savior. He taught moreover that Jesus was *not* just a man. To use our earlier terminology from discussing the Trinity, Arius was not a dynamic monarchian or adoptionist. He didn’t think, in other words, that Jesus was just like the rest of us mortals, an ordinary human being, who’d been selected by God for a prophetic function like that of Moses before Him. Arius’s sermons appear to have been based instead on the idea that Christ was the very first of all the creatures of God, an exalted being beyond even the highest of angels, and that it was this highest creature who had appeared on earth in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, said Arius, even though Jesus Christ was more than a man, it makes no sense to suppose that He was therefore Divine.

Here’s the way Arius reasoned. Whatever else we might say about true Divinity, we must agree at the very least that It’s uncaused, unproduced, or ungenerated. The Greek term Arius used, which can mean all these things, was *agenetos*. God is essentially, and undeniably, *agenetos*: He has no origin and undergoes no change. Given this metaphysical fact about God, how are we to understand the one whom the New Testament scriptures call “the Son of God”? Well clearly, said Arius, it makes no sense to suppose that this Son is also *agenetos*. Sonship implies origin and succession. No human son—Arius very rightly pointed out—is ever as old as his father. If Christ is God’s “son”, then obviously there must have been a time when Christ didn’t yet exist, and this being so, Christ could not Himself have been *agenetos*, and therefore He could not have been Divine. This decisive idea was expressed by Arius in the phrase, “There was [a time] when he [the Son] was not”, a phrase that seems to have become a kind of slogan among those who agreed with the Arian position. We’re told that the proposition was even set to music and that one could hear it being sung, not only in certain churches, but on the docks and in the saloons of Alexandria!

But to continue the story. This way of looking at Christ didn’t sit at all well with Arius’s bishop, a man named Alexander of Alexandria (d. 328). Like the majority of

Christians at that time, and like all Christians today, Alexander believed that Christ was not a *neither-nor*, but a *both-and*. He believed, in other words, that the Son of God wasn't just a superhuman and sub-divine *in-between* sort of being, but rather that He was the perfect *union* of the Divine and the human. Needless to say, it was of considerable concern to the bishop that one of the priests in his diocese should be espousing so grave an error. Friendly persuasion, clerical discipline, philosophical argument—all of these were attempted. But after several years of dispute, it was clear that matters weren't going to be resolved at the local level. So Alexander ended up appealing to Constantine, the first Christian emperor, who just a few years earlier—in 313 A.D., in the Edict of Milan—had made Christianity the official religion of his empire, ending over two hundred years of persecution and martyrdom. In response to Alexander's request, the emperor ordered that a council be held, and he even went so far as to offer food and transportation expenses out of the public coffers to bishops and other clergy from all parts of the empire so that they could attend this historic meeting. The site chosen was the Aegean coastal town of Nicaea. Altogether several hundred people showed up, of whom around three hundred bishops were officially seated as voting delegates. Deliberations lasted from May until August of the year 325.

Among the assigned materials in the Reader is a short selection from a famous treatise called “Against the Arians” by St Athanasius (see “The Word Became Flesh”, pp. 77ff). This treatise was actually written several years later, but we also have the notes Athanasius took while he was attending the council and serving as secretary to Bishop Alexander. The official record of the proceedings was lost, so it's fortunate his eyewitness account of what happened has survived. According to these notes, the council began with the two sides—Arius and his supporters and Alexander and his supporters—stating their cases in a series of opening arguments. The delegates then began to search for a compromise, seeking a resolution of the dispute on the basis of Scripture. It's important to understand, however, that at this point in history the canon of the New Testament hadn't yet been closed; in other words, there was as yet no one set of officially authorized books. Although there was certainly widespread consensus concerning what should (and shouldn't) be accepted as authoritative Scripture, it wasn't until very late in the century—in 397 A.D. at a local council in Carthage—that all 27 books of what we

now call the New Testament were first given an official stamp of approval by the Church at large. Therefore what did and didn't count as truly inspired writings was theoretically still in flux at Nicaea. Even supposing, therefore, that it could have been shown, beyond all doubt, that a particular verse in a particular chapter of a particular gospel or letter definitely referred to Christ as Divine, the Arians could (and would) have called into question the binding authority of the verse. As it happens, however, they didn't need to. From all we can tell, they were able to interpret the Scriptural texts with which they were challenged in a way that was compatible with their own convictions. Athanasius has a very amusing account of the way in which the Arians, seated in various parts of the assembly, would listen to the reading of a test Biblical statement and then wink and nod to one another, indicating that the passages, properly understood, were consistent with their views.

Meanwhile, Arius was promoting his own Biblical proof-texts. He had two special favorites, one in the Old Testament and one in the New. The Old Testament passage is Proverbs 8:22-31, where we learn of a mysterious being named Wisdom who was the first of God's creatures. The New Testament text Arius liked to stress was Colossians 1:15, in which Christ is described as "the first-born of all creation". Obviously, said Arius, the first *of* creation is itself a *part* of creation—a grammarian would call this a genitive partitive—and however *first* it might be, it's nonetheless still a *creature*. In fact, he argued, the "creature" of Colossians 1:15 is none other than the "creature" of Proverbs 8, and it's this being precisely that one encounters in Jesus.

I realize some of you reading this lecture may be shaking your heads. Surely, you're thinking, if only *you'd* been at Nicaea, this matter could have been established *sola scriptura*—by Scripture alone! As I said above, the Christian layman often assumes that the doctrine of the Incarnation is perfectly clear in the Bible and that someone would have to be perverse or just stupid to miss it. This is why I've included the "Sampling of New Testament Christology" in the Appendix to the Reader. We won't have time to look at the sampling thoroughly in class, so I'll leave it to you to reflect for yourself on the passages I cite there. When you do so, try the experiment of bracketing all you've been told, or all you may believe, about Christ as the God-Man, and then ask yourself whether, if you didn't bring this doctrine *to* these texts, you would really have been able to get it

*from* the texts alone. I've arranged the passages in an order ranging from what one might call a fairly "low" evaluation of Christ up to fairly "high", or exalted, descriptions. The first several passages all have to do with Jesus's weakness and growth: we're told, for example, that He experienced emotions and pain, that He learned things as He got older, and that there were some things He never knew. Obviously such passages were well suited to Arius's point of view. Clearly, he reasoned, a being like this could *not* have been God. But even when we turn to the other end of the spectrum, to Biblical passages describing Christ's pre-eminence and power, it's hard to find unambiguous proof that Christ is Divine in the same sense that God the Father is Divine. Arius was able to interpret even such passages as John 1:1 in his own "non-Divine" or "semi-Divine" way. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God.*" "Aha!" you might say. "Can't you see, you wicked Arians? The Word was *God*, the very same Word that 'became flesh' (according to John 1:14) in Jesus Christ. Christ is *clearly* none other than God Himself!" Arius, however, knew his Greek—in fact it was almost certainly the only language he did know—and he was able to turn a peculiarity of Greek grammar to his benefit. He argued that whereas the Word was *with* "the" God in the second phrase of this verse—"the God" is *ton theon* in the Greek—this same Word was only "a" God in the third phrase of the verse, for in that case there's no definite, and for Arius decisive, article before *theos*. (I'll try to explain this grammatical subtlety more fully in class.) So even here, taking this very high estimate of Christ the Word as seriously as possible, there was no proving from the Bible alone that Christ shares in the full Divinity of the Father.

Anyway, back to the council. At this point in the debate, since merely quoting the Scriptures wasn't getting anywhere, it was proposed that the delegates consider some of the early confessions of faith that were being used in the parish churches of the time. Maybe they would be able to shed some authoritative light on the issue. One of the Arians took immediate advantage of this suggestion and presented a statement of faith that Arius himself had composed. But according to Athanasius, it was snatched from his hands and torn to pieces. Arius in turn reacted in anger, a brawl broke out, and Arius ended up getting slapped by a delegate named Nicholas of Myra, whom we now know as St Nicholas, patron of children and the historical source of Santa Claus. (It's obviously

important to know that St Nick disapproves of Arianism!) When things finally calmed down, other participants began suggesting alternative statements of faith. Someone proposed that a resolution might be reached on the basis of one of the most ancient of all Christian confessions, what we now call the Apostles' Creed, which dates back to the middle of the second century A.D. But a quick glance at this creed is enough to show how completely inadequate it was to the matter at hand (see the Reader, 219). Then a man named Eusebius (c. 260 - c. 340) suggested that the council consider the creed that had been used for many decades in his own home church in Caesarea, and he proceeded to read this creed into the record (see also 219). But here once again the Arians, who for obvious reasons were especially delighted by the phrase "first-born of all creation", were easily able to give their own interpretation to every point in the statement. It was clear to everyone that this document wouldn't serve as a sufficient litmus test for either side in the controversy. Both parties could read their distinctive perspectives into the very same words.

Now at this point, a *very* curious thing happened. According to Athanasius, the emperor Constantine, who up to this point had been quietly observing the proceedings, stood up, smoothed out the folds in his flowing robes, cleared his imperial throat, and offered the suggestion that perhaps this Creed of Caesarea could be revised just a bit, with the aim of clarifying certain key ideas. Even though he had no theological authority, nobody was going to dispute with the emperor. So this creed was, as we'd say today, referred to committee. Deliberations lasted several days, and when the committee members reported back to the full assembly, what they presented was quickly and very expeditiously ratified as *the* definitive statement concerning Jesus Christ, a statement we know to this day as the "Creed of Nicaea". (Just to be clear: the Creed of Nicaea is not the same as the Nicene Creed; the latter is based on the former, but adds a few further points that were decided on at the next Ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople in 381. The Creed of Nicaea appears on page 220 of the Reader). As you can see, the committee had changed several things. It was crystal clear the Arians would no longer be able to reinterpret the words to suit their own perspective on Christ. One key term in particular had been added, the Greek word *homoousion*, meaning "of the same

essence or being”. With this word, the essential sameness of Christ’s kind of being with the being of God the Father was firmly, undeniably, and irrevocably stipulated.

But the obvious question that has to be asked here is *Why*? Why did the council decide at this very critical juncture in its proceedings to endorse so radical a modification of the earlier statement of faith? Why did the delegates see fit to introduce a technical term into an earlier creed, already long in use, when that term was not (as it happens) even Biblical and had never appeared before in any previous Christian confession? Why did they choose to side in so uncompromising and inflexible a way with Bishop Alexander and his supporters rather than with Arius and the Arian party? The cynic, of course, has a ready reply to these questions. “It’s all just politics,” he will say. “The committee was obviously ‘stacked’. As anyone knows who has even a smattering of historical knowledge, the Church has always been full of politicians. Clearly a bishop has more clout than a lowly priest, and when the bishop in question also had the emperor on his side, it was only a matter of time before poor Arius would be kicked out of the Church.” As for the traditionalist Christian, he too will have a ready response. “There’s absolutely no way to account for this sudden and unexpected shift at the Council, from rancorous division to virtual unanimity, without realizing that it must have been the result of Divine intervention. Christ had promised that the Holy Spirit would lead His followers into ‘all truth’ (John 16:13), and it’s that very Spirit who must have descended upon the fathers of the Church at Nicaea, even as He descended upon the apostles at Jerusalem on Pentecost.”

Our concern in this class is of course theological, and in addressing the question of *why*, we’re therefore obliged to answer in a way that differs from both these responses. Rather than engaging in a skeptical dismissal of the matter and rather than resorting to pious statements of praise, we need to focus our attention on the logic of the claim in question, keeping in mind the systematic links between doctrines. When we do so, we begin to realize that the Council of Nicaea ended up making this change and insisting on Christ’s deity for specific theological reasons. Whatever the political context might have been, and whatever the Divine explanation one might choose to believe in, the rationale behind the new creed seems very clear, and it’s closely connected to our discussion last time.

It's connected, to be precise, to the sufferings of infralapsarian man. No matter their other disputes, everyone at the Council believed that Jesus Christ is the savior, who had come into the world in order to solve the problems resulting from the Fall of man. I've said that an explicit doctrine of Christ as the God-Man is nowhere to be found in the Bible. What certainly *is* to be found, however, is a repeated insistence that Christ is the key to salvation. Even Arius, as I've mentioned, agreed about that. But if that's really so, says the systematic theologian—if Christ is able to function as the savior of man—He must have had sufficient power to address the full range of man's suffering. He must have had the capacity, in other words, to reverse each and every one of the hamartiological effects of the Fall on man's nature.

1. At the very least, a genuine savior would have to be a superb teacher, for fallen man's *mind* is ignorant. Teaching, however, is something that the Arian Christ, the highest of all the creatures of God, would obviously be fully capable of. Such a being, having dwelt so close to God from the very beginning of time, could surely instruct man in the highest truths.

2. A true savior must also be a model of perfect composure, for fallen man's *emotions* are out of control, driven by circumstance and chained to the mood of the moment. Here again the Arian picture of Christ is well suited to the task at hand: above and beyond even the unfallen angels, this exalted creature could easily master his feelings, and his power would be such that he could exorcise the demons that have invaded men's souls, giving them peace and equanimity.

3. Furthermore, anyone worthy of being addressed as a savior would need to be a paragon of obedience, self-abnegation, and voluntary service to God, for fallen man's *will* is enslaved to self-interest, and he desperately needs to be lifted up and out of his egotistical habits. Once more, however, it's easy for the Arian Christ to do this, and thus to demonstrate how man should behave before God: if so exalted a being as the "first creature" is obedient to God, how much more should the rest of us be.

4. Finally, though—and now here comes the rub—a real savior, says the systematic theologian, must be able to reverse one additional effect of the Fall, the effect which is manifest in the *body's* mortality; enlightened teaching, emotional control, and selfless obedience are all well and good, but a savior must also be able to do battle with

death and to win and, through that victory, to give to man new life beyond death. Such a power, however—the power to give life where it’s not, to restore life when it’s passed—is really none other than the power to create life in the first place, to bring it into being *ex nihilo*. And this is a power belonging by definition to God alone. Therefore, says the theologian, one is obliged to conclude that a truly adequate savior must Himself be Divine—that He must be, in the language of the Nicene committee, “of one essence with the Father”.

Politics and piety aside, this was the theological logic that led to the conviction, *the* decisive and distinctive conviction of traditional Christianity, that Jesus Christ is *God* incarnate.

**Lecture 13:**  
**Like Us In All Things**

We're discussing the fourth chapter of *The Orthodox Way*, a chapter devoted to the Christian doctrine of "God as Man". With regard to our outline, this means that we're focusing on Roman numeral III, and our task is to try to understand both what Jesus Christ *does* and who or what Jesus Christ *is*. To add two new terms to your growing vocabulary, what we're now engaged in is a study of *soteriology* and *Christology*. "Soteriology" is based on the Greek word for savior, *soter*, and it simply means a study of the aims and the means of salvation—the means whereby fallen man is restored to his unfallen status. "Christology" is based on the Greek word for Messiah, *Christos*, and it refers to a study, not only of the meaning of "Christ" *per se*, but of other traditional titles and descriptions of Him, such as "Son of God", "Word", "Son of Man", "Redeemer", and so on. The aim of this second "-ology" is to come to a clearer understanding of Jesus's ontological status.

I began my last lecture by positioning traditional Christology as a "tetralemma". Whatever else they might say about Christ, Christians—whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—may *not* say that He's only a man, nor that He's only God, nor that He's neither man nor God, nor that He's both man and God (in the sense of some half-and-half combination or hybrid). One is to believe instead that Jesus Christ is a single Person in whom exist two distinct natures, one of them completely human and the other completely Divine. I devoted the rest of that lecture to providing some historical context. As I've said, systematic theology doesn't as a rule concern itself much with the history of doctrine. Its aim is to trace the path indicated in the Christian map of Reality, without reference to when and how that map was first drawn. But in this case it seemed to me wise to give you at least a glimpse of how the early Church came to formulate its views on this subject. And so we turned back the clock and looked at the controversy between Arius and Alexander, and at the proceedings of the first Ecumenical Council, the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., where for the first time in history it was explicitly and officially stated that Christ has the "same essence" or "substance" as the Father—that He is *homoousion* with God Himself. In spite of Arius's unexceptionable observation that

*human* sons are never as old as their fathers, and at the risk of seeming to advocate a strange brand of polytheism and idolatry, the Church felt obliged to affirm that the Son of *God*, Jesus Christ, is nonetheless fully Divine: that He's "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten, not made" (to quote from the Creed of Nicaea [Reader, 220]). As for *why* this was said, why the Tradition insisted on what would inevitably seem to others so outlandish a claim, once we've factored out the cynic's explanation that it was a matter of ecclesiastical politics and the believer's conviction that it was decreed by the Holy Spirit, it appears the reasons were primarily of a theological order, or more precisely—I can now use one of our new words—the reasons had to do with soteriology. This highest of Christianity's claims about who Jesus *is* (III.B.) is rooted, in other words, in its understanding of what Jesus has *done* in order to save fallen man (III.A.).

From the very beginning, Christians had confessed their belief in Jesus Christ as their savior, a belief in fact shared by the Arians. But the theologian, seeking like St Thomas Aquinas to explain by reason what has been accepted on faith, is obliged to go further and wrestle with the question of just what this may mean. What exactly does being a savior entail? Judging by what St Athanasius says in his treatise "Against the Arians", the answer arrived at by the first of the Ecumenical Councils was basically this: whatever else the word might imply, calling Christ "savior" means that He's able to free human beings from *all* the effects of the Fall, including their mortality. A savior isn't really a savior unless He's able to bring new life out of death. But bringing life out of death—giving life where there's *no* life—requires nothing less than the refashioning or "re-creation" of man. And this requirement, this soteriological prerequisite, obliges one to conclude that a true savior must Himself be Divine. Why? Because God is the one who made man to begin with, and only the one who *first* fashioned is able now to *refashion*. Thus according to Athanasius, "The purpose [of the Incarnation] is that we may have our origin relocated in Him and that we may no longer return to earth because mere earth is what we are, but may be carried by Him into the heavens because we are joined to the Logos who comes from heaven." The saint continues, "The flesh [of man] is no longer earthly [*i.e.*, subject to corruption and death: mortal], but now it has been 'logified' by the work of the Divine Logos who on our account became flesh" (Reader, 81). The point, to

repeat, is that any Being capable of so radically transforming the human condition as to reverse the effects of death itself must be more than a fellow creature, however exalted; it must instead be “of the same essence” as God the creator. Hence, the theologian concludes, Christ *must* be Divine.

Now it’s very important to keep in mind that everything I’ve said so far in discussing Nicaea, the first of the councils, is only *half* of the traditional Christological picture. We need to remember that, according to traditional Christian teaching, Jesus of Nazareth, though He *is entirely* Divine, is not *solely* Divine, but at the same time also *entirely* human. The Council at Nicaea had taken its stand quite firmly and irrevocably against those who wished to deny the Divinity. But that dramatic stand was by no means the end of the story. For in the years after this initial gathering, controversies and debates began to arise on the opposite side of the issue as questions were raised concerning the reality of Christ’s humanity and people began to speculate concerning the precise mode of His relationship with other human beings. The Creed of Nicaea had affirmed that the “Lord Jesus Christ” was “made man”. One who was essentially Divine—that is, the Son or Word or *Logos*, the Second Person of the eternal Trinity—had “become” human as well. But in claiming that Christ was *made man*, Nicaea did *not* specify in precisely what sense either the word “man” or the word “made” was to be understood. It hadn’t yet explained, in other words, what it was that was “human” about the God-Man, nor what was involved in His “becoming” that human.

As Ware points out, the Tradition’s understanding of Christ rests upon two very important soteriological points, two points lying at the very heart of the whole Christian religion, and if you take Christianity seriously at all, you’re obliged to take these details seriously too. Let me quote from *The Orthodox Way*: “Underlying the conciliar definitions about Christ as God and man, there are two basic principles concerning our salvation. First, *only God can save us*. A prophet or teacher of righteousness cannot be the redeemer of the world. If, then, Christ is to be our Saviour, He must be fully and completely God. Secondly, *salvation must reach the point of human need*. Only if Christ is fully and completely a man as we are, can we men share in what He has done for us” (73). The Council at Nicaea, in condemning Arianism, had been concerned above all with the first of these principles, with the necessity that Christ be Divine. Succeeding councils,

which followed over the course of the next 450 years or so, were predominantly concerned by contrast with the second principle, with explaining both the mode of Christ's humanity and the nature of its union with His Divinity. They were basically intended to clarify the "human side" of what St Athanasius calls the "double account" of the Savior (77). The essential claim of these councils—to borrow the words of Pope Leo I in his "Letter to Flavian"—was that "we [humans] would not be able to overcome the author of sin and of death unless He whom sin could not stain nor death hold took on our nature and made it His own" (Reader, 85). "That is why," St Leo continues, "true God was born in the integral and complete nature of a true human being, entire [not just] in what belongs to Him [as God], [but] entire in what belongs to us [as human beings]" (86).

That's a mouthful, I know. What I'd like to do now is to try to explain the logic behind all of this by directing your attention to some of the main doctrinal points that emerged from the next three Ecumenical Councils, specifically the second, third, and fourth of these meetings, which were convened respectively in Constantinople (in 381), Ephesus (in 431), and Chalcedon (in 451). Had we all the time in the world, I'd sketch for you, as I did with Nicaea, the actual proceedings of the councils themselves, but given our schedule I'll just mention some highlights, enough that you should be able to grasp the underlying rationale of the traditional Christian position. I'm assuming you've studied the Reader by now—specifically, that you've had a chance to look at my "Sampling of New Testament Christology" and that you're familiar with the selections from Athanasius and Leo and with the Decree of the Council at Chalcedon. I'll be drawing upon all of these in my remarks below.

Each of the early councils follows much the same pattern. Somebody starts preaching or teaching a particular theory, and a controversy arises. Initially, the theory makes a certain amount of sense and seems consistent with what had been explicitly believed by Christians up to that time, but it soon becomes clear that the teaching in question fails to address certain crucial Christological issues or to answer specific soteriological needs, and the Church is therefore obliged to refute it. In the case of Nicaea, the man who got everything started was Arius. With the second council, the Council of Constantinople, the instigator of controversy was a man named Apollinarius (*c.* 310 - *c.* 390), a bishop of the church in Laodicea.

The first thing you should know is that Apollinarius completely accepted the idea that Jesus Christ is Divine. Nicaea was a *fait accompli* after all, and Apollinarius had no wish to call into question the wisdom of that earlier council. The problem instead was with the other side of the doctrine, the claim that Christ was at the same time fully or essentially human. According to Apollinarius, the only thing about Jesus that was genuinely human was his body. He did indeed have a body like ours, which was capable of being seen and touched and which exhibited other properties common to the human physical organism. But inwardly, where we have a human soul and a spirit, Jesus possessed only His uncreated Divinity. He looked like a man, talked like a man, ate and drank and perspired like a man, but these functions were artificially maintained by the invisible and inward Deity simply for the sake of appearances. The humanity of Christ consisted in no more than a physical container while the content was purely Divine. Apollinarius's aim in looking at Christ in this way was to explain how a perfect and immutable being, namely God, could be truly present on earth and fully involved in the affairs of men without being subject to alteration or change, which would compromise His aseity. Jews and Muslims would insist that it's already a blasphemous compromise to suppose that God might be incarnate in this world in the first place. But for Apollinarius, incarnation or embodiment *per se* presented no problem. He believed God could inhabit the interior of one of His created forms without having to sacrifice any of His sovereignty or dignity, just as a king can enter the hut of a beggar without ceasing to be the king. The difficulties arise, according to Apollinarius, only if one begins to suppose that Christ somehow united Himself with a *complete* human being, having not just a body but also a soul. This would mean God had made Himself subject to change—subject (specifically) to the vicissitudes, doubts, hesitations, and temptations that assail the minds and the feelings of ordinary men. Just imagine if the king's mind were somehow merged with that of the beggar! What if the Divine King came to play the part of *King Lear*?!

I don't wish to go into the technical philosophy here, but it seems that Apollinarius conceived of the body as static and of the soul as dynamic. The body in his view is simply a space, which can be entered by God without compromise. By contrast, the soul, as the principle of movement in creatures, is somehow linked up with time and hence with the whole realm of change. If, therefore, God had entered into union with a

*complete* human being, a human like us with a *soul*, then He would have become caught in the flux and movement of time—which (said Apollinarius) is simply not possible, given the nature of God. This reasoning has a certain plausibility, obviously—so much so, in fact, that in my experience many Christians today who say they believe in the God-Man, and who assume they’re belief is consistent with the Christian Tradition, are actually unconscious Apollinarians, thinking of Jesus as God in a sort of “body suit”. We’ll want to discuss this point further in class.

In any case, the fathers of the second council decided they must reject this Christology, and once again (as in the rejection of Arianism) their reasoning seems to have been largely soteriological in character. The whole point of God’s becoming man in Jesus Christ, they said, was to save human beings. But human beings are more than just bodies. They also have minds, and wills, and emotions, and these levels of the human microcosm are just as much in need of salvation as the physical part. They too require the deifying, purifying, and healing energies that flow from the Divine *Logos* or Son. Hence, the Incarnation must consist in God’s uniting Himself with the whole of human nature, including both body and soul. One of the leading figures at the Council, St Gregory of Nazianzus—we met him back in Lecture 7—expressed this consensus in the form of a short (and now often quoted) Greek aphorism: *to apróslêton atherápeuton*. “That which is not assumed is not healed.” It’s vital to man’s salvation—this is the point of the formula—that whatever needs healing or saving must be taken up (or “assumed”) into full union with the Divine and made one with God’s nature in order that the energies of God might suffuse and permeate and transform it. As I hope you’ve noticed St Athanasius speaks at some length about the effects this transformation has on man’s emotions or passions. Although “the Logos Himself is impassible [that is, not able to suffer] by nature, He nevertheless has [human] passions predicated of Him in virtue of the flesh He took on [the word “flesh” refers here, as it does in St Paul’s letters, to both body and soul].... He Himself remains as He is—impassible in nature. He takes no hurt from these passions [which He nonetheless truly experiences], but on the contrary destroys them and brings them to nothing. And human beings [here’s the soteriological point], because *their own passions have been transferred to the impassible and abolished*, are henceforth becoming impassible and free of them to all eternity” (82, my italics).

Therefore, whatever anyone might say in the future, it was no longer possible after the Council at Constantinople for a *bona fide* Christian to think of Christ as possessing anything less than a complete human nature. (Ware elaborates on this point, 74-75.)

Turning now to the Council at Ephesus, we discover that the key figure who got everything started was a man named Nestorius (d. 451), who was the Patriarch of Constantinople. It's of interest to note that as we move from the first to the third of the Ecumenical Councils, the heresiarchs become men of increasing ecclesiastical stature: Arius was a priest, Apollinarius was a bishop, and Nestorius was a patriarch, which is basically a head bishop—the head (in this case) of one of the five ancient sees of the Church and thus a man of considerable ecclesiastical influence. I point this out in order to counter an all too common opinion in our day. It's fashionable in some circles to pretend that those early centuries were characterized by a chaos of competing “Christianities”, each of them equally valid and each competing for interpretive space. Based on this supposed diversity, certain critics attempt to dismiss or demean the Tradition on the grounds that its defenders simply had more political clout. Orthodoxy, they say, is just a name for the winners. But that's in fact very far from the truth. The condemnation of certain theological positions in the early Church was not a question of squelching people who were politically weak. As patriarch of what had become by then *the* most important Christian city in the empire, Nestorius had considerable power from a bureaucratic or institutional standpoint, and yet this power was no protection against the eventual rejection of his teaching. The cynic's reduction of theology to a question of politics is clearly mistaken.

Nestorius's teaching about Christ first came into focus, shortly after he was enthroned as patriarch, when he handed down a decree to the churches under his authority that they must henceforth suppress the use of a particular term that had become popular in pious devotion to the Virgin Mary. The patriarch seems to have been a proponent of speech codes, and the word he sought to forbid was the Greek term *Theotokos*, which means “Bearer of God” or “Mother of God”. This word had been used from quite ancient times, at least since the late second century, as a devotional and liturgical title for Christ's mother, and by the early fifth century it was quite widespread among Christians. But Nestorius believed the term was problematic for two reasons: first,

it absurdly implied that the eternal God, beyond all time as we know it, could have a temporal origin; and second, it had the dangerous effect of elevating Mary beyond what he considered her proper station as a creature. According to Nestorius, Christians should refer to the Virgin instead as *Christotokos*, that is, “Bearer of Christ”, for Christ or Messiah is a title properly belonging to a human being, and it was only the human *half* of the God-Man that Mary was the mother or bearer of. It simply makes no sense, however, to call her the mother of that *part* of Christ that was Divine.

Once again, as with the Arian and Apollinarian teachings, this perspective seems very logical, at least on the surface. Which is why, once again—if those I’ve discussed this point with are at all a representative sample—many Christians today who think they’re being perfectly orthodox are actually Nestorian heretics. Having been taught that Christ is *both* God *and* man, they’ve compartmentalized the two natures in their minds. Whether they would put it quite this way or not, they tend to think of the Incarnation as a 50/50 affair. Like Nestorius, they think in terms of a Divine *part* and a human *part* of the God-Man. Unlike the Arians they don’t deny the Divinity, and unlike the Apollinarians, they don’t deny the humanity. Christ, they would say, is really and completely Divine while at the same time He’s really and completely human. Nevertheless, what they have in mind as they say this is a sort of composite being, like a faun or a centaur. Just as the faun is half man and half goat, and just as the centaur is half man and half horse, so Christ is half man and half God. The two natures are both fully present in Him, but their conjunction or union is strictly external—as if the Divinity and the humanity had been somehow stapled together. Something like this seems to have been the case with Nestorius. For according to his teaching, the union between the man named Jesus of Nazareth and the Divine Son of God was not of a substantial or “hypostatic” kind—we’ll consider this latter term more fully in class—but instead one of volition and honor. Jesus the man had perfectly willed to do what God asked of Him, and God had in turn honored and rewarded Jesus with the sustaining presence of His Word.

But wait just a minute! said the fathers of the third council. If this were truly the case—if the two natures simply existed side by side within Christ without any interpenetration or any essential, inward unity—there would be no way for the deifying energies of God truly to suffuse and to penetrate the humanity of those in need of

salvation. If Christ's humanity were one thing and His Divinity something quite separate—as would be the case if Mary were the mother of only the manhood in Jesus—then His human nature, including His physical body, could not have become the antidote to death that it is, and it would have made no sense for Him to say, as He does in the Gospel of John, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (John 6:53-54). Unless the flesh and blood of Christ are Divine, Christians are merely cannibals.

I mention this passage from Scripture very deliberately, for it appears that the eventual rejection of Nestorius's position by the delegates to the third council was based not only on theoretical arguments as to what salvation requires, but on the fact that early Christians had experienced, through their participation in the Eucharist—through eating the “bread” and drinking the “wine” of Communion—a genuine change in themselves and in their relation to God. As early as the second century, St Irenaeus had observed, “Our teaching is consonant with what we do in the Eucharist, and the celebration of the Eucharist establishes what we teach” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.18.4-5). You get a hint of this experiential dimension with St Athanasius: “Just as the Lord became a human being when He put on a body, so we human beings, once we have been connected to Him by way of His flesh [this is a reference to the Eucharist], are divinized by the Logos, and from that point on we are the heirs of eternal life” (Reader, 83). The same point is made, even more explicitly, in a famous letter to Nestorius from a fellow patriarch, St Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), the year before the Council of Ephesus convened. Cyril writes, “We approach the mystical gifts [this is a typical Eastern Christian way of referring to Communion] and are sanctified, becoming partakers of the holy flesh and the honorable blood of Christ the Savior of us all, not receiving it as ordinary flesh—God forbid!—nor as that of a man sanctified and conjoined with the Word by a unity of honor, or as one who had received a Divine indwelling [these were the Nestorian claims], but as truly life-giving and *the Word's own flesh*. For being by nature, as God, life, when He had become one with his own flesh, He made it life-giving” (“Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius” [*Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy, p. 352]).

Notice that phrase “the Word’s own flesh”. St Cyril’s point is that Christ’s body, and by extension (says the Tradition) all His other human attributes, were not the property or possession of something other than the Divine Son of God, but rather His very own attributes and qualities. It is His flesh that Christians consume in the Eucharist, and similarly it was His body (and not another’s) that was born in a manger in Bethlehem, His mind (and not another’s) that increased in wisdom as Jesus grew older, and His emotions that felt anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane at His impending death. What Cyril is describing is expressed in technical theological parlance by the Latin phrase *communicatio idiomatum*, which means a communication, or a sharing, of properties. Those properties, attributes, or functions that serve as the distinguishing marks of humanity were in Jesus Christ the properties, attributes, and functions of the eternal Son of God. Hence we can truly say that in Christ God was born (Luke 2:7), God grew up (Luke 2:52), and God wept (John 11:35). We can even say that God Himself *died*, as the fifth Ecumenical Council would later spell out when it met in 553 (see Ware, 72). And of course, all this being so, we can certainly say of the Virgin Mary that she is *Theotokos* or “Mother of God” (Ware, 71, 77). Christ isn’t a combination of two different things. He’s instead one single thing, namely, the Son of God, who assumed into Himself, in addition to His nature as God, the “properties” of human nature as well. To quote St Cyril again: “The one that overcame death was one of us.... If He conquered as God, to us it is nothing; but if He conquered as man we conquered in Him. For He is to us the second Adam come from heaven according to the Scriptures” (Commentary on John 13:36).

To sum up what we’ve learned so far. By the time the third council had met and handed down its decisions, it was becoming ever clearer what must, and what mustn’t, be thought and taught about Christ if one wished to be a faithful member of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” (Nicene Creed; Reader, 221). It was clear, first, that He was *Divine*; second, that His Divinity had united itself with a *complete* human nature; and third, that this union was such that *His Divinity completely suffused His humanity*. But there was one further point that had to be nailed down, and as usual it took a controversial teaching to provide the occasion and a fourth council, at Chalcedon, to provide the solution. St Paul writes, “There must be heresies among you in order that the genuine may be proved” (1 Cor. 11:19), and it seems that with each new heretical alternative the

early Church was able to reach a yet more explicit formulation of its Christological doctrine. In this case, the controversialist was a man named Eutyches (378-454), who was the abbot of a large monastery in Constantinople. (Notice, once again, the variety in our cast of heretical characters. We encountered first a priest, then a bishop, then a patriarch, and now we come to an abbot. Clearly an abbot is a step down from a patriarch in terms of political power, and yet, given the extensive influence of the monasteries in the Christian East, Eutyches was definitely not just your average layman. We see yet again that the promoters of heresy were by no means lacking in institutional clout.)

Like the other heresiarchs before him, Eutyches had accepted the decisions of the earlier councils. Indeed he seems to have been especially attracted to the anti-Nestorian teaching of Ephesus that the human nature of Christ was hypostatically united with the Divinity of the Son. Eutyches wished to go even further, however. It seemed to him not enough just to say that Christ's humanity was suffused or imbued with Divinity. If we really understand the nature of God, what we should actually be saying (he thought) is that this humanity was completely extinguished, wholly taken up and transformed into God. The image he had in mind seems to have been that of a tiny drop of colored water falling into the ocean somewhere. Obviously the enormous contrast in volume would mean that the color was overwhelmed and extinguished by the uncolored water around it. For all intents and purposes, the color would no longer exist. Well, something like this must have occurred, said Eutyches, when the human nature of Christ was joined to Divinity. Two natures had been united in some fashion, one Divine and one human, but after their conjunction in the Incarnation—after the “colored drop” of a man had joined with the pure “ocean” of God—there remained in Christ only *one* nature, namely, His Divine nature as God. Christ is *of* two natures [*ek dúo phýseôn*], said Eutyches, but He exists *in* only one nature. Theologians call this point of view “monophysitism”—literally, one-nature-ism—and Eutyches and other people who hold it are therefore known as monophysites.

Once again this makes excellent sense when you first hear it. And yet once again the other delegates to the Council of Chalcedon felt obliged to reject these seemingly logical claims, teaching instead—in a subtle shift of prepositions—that Christ is not simply *of*, but *in* two natures [*en dúo phýsesin*]. The reason for their rejection was in

many ways the same as the reason for rejecting the earlier views of Apollinarius. They were concerned that Eutyches was neglecting the second of Ware's two principles, that "salvation must reach the point of human need". Like the Apollinarians before them, the monophysites seemed to have forgotten that in order to save men Christ was obliged to be *one* with them, to make their humanity His very own property, and to share in their nature to the point of experiencing their very sorrows and pain, and even their death itself. Where the Apollinarians had as it were "decapitated" the human nature of Christ by limiting it to the physical body alone, Eutyches and his followers had formulated an even more problematic theory in which the human nature was eclipsed or erased altogether.

To go back to the *tetralemma* one more time: the dynamic monarchians (or adoptionists) had suggested that Christ was only human; the Arians had taught that He was neither human nor Divine; and the Apollinarians and Nestorians (in their different ways) had said that He was partly human and partly Divine. Now the monophysites were saying that He was only Divine. But this, objected the council fathers, was clearly in contradiction to the teaching of the Scriptures. As Pope Leo I stressed in his "Letter to Flavian", the Bible makes it clear in numerous places that in Christ "each nature retained its characteristics without defect, and just as the 'form of God' does not remove the 'form of a slave', so the 'form of a slave' does not diminish the 'form of God'" (Reader 87; St Leo is alluding to Phil. 2:5-12). "In this unity," Leo continues, "there is no deception as long as both lowliness and divine loftiness have their reciprocal spheres. Just as God is not altered by His compassion, so humanity is not destroyed by its elevation in honor" (88). Eutyches and the monophysites were making the mistake of assuming that the two natures could exist only in a kind of competition for the same inward "space" in the God-Man, and of course were that so the humanity could only be displaced and destroyed, unable to stand up (as it were) to the greater force of Divinity. But in fact there's no competition. Divinity and humanity exist in different "dimensions", if you will, and their relationship is such that each can be fully itself in its relationship with the other. In fact, the human being becomes even *more* human—more and not less itself—in its relation with God.

Here I'll end this admittedly difficult and demanding lecture. As you'll see later, these subtle points, like the "openness" of the Eastern doctrine of the Trinity, have tremendously important consequences for the Christian view of salvation.

**Lecture 14:**  
**What If There Were No Fall?**

I come now to the last of my lectures on the doctrine of Christ as the God-Man. In an effort to give you some sense of the historical roots of this doctrine, I've been discussing the Ecumenical Councils of the early Church, and in my last lecture I conducted a sort of whirlwind tour of three of those councils. I began by reminding you of what Ware calls the two "principles of salvation": first, that *only God can save*; second, that *salvation must reach the point of human need*. I explained that whereas the first council at Nicaea had been concerned mainly with the first of these principles, in its insistence that Christ is Divine, the next three councils were more interested in the second principle. They were concerned with the mode and degree of Christ's humanity and with the question of how this humanity is linked with His Deity.

I spoke first about the second council at Constantinople. This council, I explained, rejected the teachings of a man named Apollinarius, who had claimed that Christ was not fully human—that the only thing human about Him was His physical body. But no, the other delegates countered, that's simply not true. Were Christ not in fact human in every respect, He would not have been able to save the whole human being, for (to use St Gregory the Theologian's formula) "that which is not assumed is not healed". Christ's human dimension must therefore include not just a body, but a soul as well. We looked, secondly, at the Council of Ephesus. This was the council which rejected the teachings of a man named Nestorius, who had taught that Christ was a 50/50 sort of being, part man and part God, with Mary being the mother only of his human half. But if this were true, the fathers argued, it would not be possible for the eternal life inherent in the Divine nature to be received by the Christian communicant in Christ's body and blood, and Christ's statement in scripture, "Unless a man eat my flesh and drink my blood, my life is not in him", would be meaningless. The two natures must be so linked in Christ's Person that each shares the properties of the other in a *communicatio idiomatum*: on the one hand, Christ's body and His other human attributes truly share in the eternal life of His Deity; while on the other hand His Deity truly shares in His life as a man, such that God Himself can be said to have been born of Mary, the *Theotokos*.

Finally, we glanced at the fourth of the Ecumenical Councils, the Council of Chalcedon. Here the man who got things started was an abbot named Eutyches, who had the idea that while two distinct natures had indeed come together in Christ, one Divine and one human, the human nature was henceforth extinguished or eclipsed in its union with God, such that after the Incarnation Christ existed in one nature alone. Once again, the council felt obliged to say no, rejecting this monophysite claim. The reasoning was based in part on the Bible, as we can see in Pope Leo I's "Letter to Flavian". For it's perfectly clear in the Scriptures that two very different natures continued to operate in Christ throughout His whole earthly life. The lesson we're to draw from this fact, said the Chalcedonian delegates, is that the Divine and human are not in competition with each other and that it's therefore *not* the case that the human must be diminished, overpowered, or destroyed in its relation with Deity. On the contrary, man becomes even more himself in his union with God.

I've asked that you read the statement of faith that was issued by this fourth council, the Definition of Chalcedon (p. 221-22), and in wrapping up this part of our discussion today, I'll be examining it rather closely with you in class. Issued to guard against the monophysite position of Eutyches, the Definition was intentionally worded in such a way as to repudiate each of the other heresies we've been considering too, and for this reason the Definition of Chalcedon, or (as it's sometimes called) the Formula of Chalcedon, has been historically important in summing up the traditional Christian picture of Christ. It's the most complete and precise of all Christological statements, a statement traditionally accepted by all three of the major branches of Christendom: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant. Kallistos Ware, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and all their co-religionists would agree that this is the place to go to if you want to understand the essential points of Christology. Be sure to read the Definition before coming to class, and be ready with questions.

For the remainder of this lecture, however, I'm going to change direction and speak no more of the councils. I want to spend some time discussing a different way of approaching this whole issue of "God as man". In order to have a complete and balanced picture, you need to know about one more important feature of the Tradition's teaching on Christ.

Up to this point we've been talking about the doctrine of the God-Man simply as a solution to the problem of the Fall. To refer to our Outline of Systematic Theology, the essential unity of III.B with I.A has been approached as a way of explaining how III.A can change II.B back to II.A. In other words, up to this point Christology has been conceived strictly and solely in light of soteriology. Jesus is understood to be both God and man because of what He does as man's savior. As we've seen, this was the approach of the early Church, with the doctrine of the Incarnation taking the form it does as a way of underscoring the requirements of human salvation.

As Ware points out in Chapter 4, however, this is not the only way of thinking about the Incarnation. The soteriological approach, although it came first and has been the most common, is not the only means of coming to terms with the idea of the God-Man. It has always been possible to ask the more speculative questions: What would have happened if there had never been a Fall? Suppose that mankind hadn't needed saving, would God have still become incarnate as man? As you know, our author himself poses this question in *The Orthodox Way*. "The Incarnation," he writes, "is God's supreme act of deliverance, restoring us to communion with Himself. But what would have happened if there had never been a Fall? Would God have chosen to become man, even if man had never sinned? Should the Incarnation be regarded simply as God's response to the predicament of fallen man, or is it in some way part of the eternal purpose of God? Should we look behind the Fall, and see God's act of becoming man as the fulfillment of man's true destiny? To this hypothetical question," Ware adds, "it is not possible for us, in our present situation, to give any final answer" (70).

Significantly enough, however, he goes on to point out that certain theologians and Church fathers *did* in fact answer these question, and they did so in the affirmative. He mentions three in particular: St Isaac the Syrian (d. c. 700), St Maximos the Confessor (c. 580 - 662), and Duns Scotus (c. 1265 - 1308). And by the end of this short section, Ware seems to have convinced himself, too, that the answer is yes. "Only in Jesus Christ," he writes, "do we see revealed the full possibilities of our human nature.... From the very first moment of man's creation in the image [of God], the Incarnation of Christ was in some way already implied. The true reason for the Incarnation, then, lies not in man's sinfulness but in his unfallen nature as a being made in the Divine image and

capable of union with God” (70-71). Ware doesn’t actually tell you this, but what he’s describing is in many ways the unofficial position of a significant number of Orthodox theologians, and not a few their Roman Catholic peers. It’s by no means an Orthodox dogma that one *has* to think of the Incarnation this way, but it’s nonetheless a very common *theologoumenon*, or “pious opinion”, in the Christian East—to believe that in some way or other a *Theanthropos* or “God-Man” was in the cards from the very beginning.

But whether one is Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or “none of the above”, and whatever one’s own views might happen to be on this subject, it seemed to me worth pointing out, as we conclude this central section of the course, that Christian teaching about Christ may well concern something more fundamental than simply solving the problems of sin and mortality. If saintly theologians like Isaac and Maximos are right, Christology may have less to do with soteriology and more to do with anthropology: less to do, in other words, with getting man out of his fallen situation and more to do with perfecting or completing what man already is in himself. To make the same point in a more provocative way: it may turn out that the real subject of Christology is the whole of mankind. If Ware and these other Christians are correct, the Incarnation is not only something that *happened* (in the past tense) in Jesus of Nazareth. It’s something that *is happening* (in the present tense) in us as well. The Incarnation is from this point of view an eternal and therefore on-going process, as befits the very nature of a God who transcends time as we know it. The God-Man was not a once-and-for-all exception to the rule, but the rule itself.

This is where the reading from C. S. Lewis comes in. In a chapter from his book on *Miracles* called “The Grand Miracle”, Lewis argues that the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ was the recapitulation of a wider or more general pattern in the universe established by God from the very start, a pattern that can be discerned throughout the entire order of nature. Rather than being the exception to the general rule of the universe, the Incarnation is that very rule itself writ large. Lewis refers to the cosmic pattern in question as one of “descent and re-ascent”, and it’s clear from what he says that it’s the very same principle we were looking at earlier when we discussed the “perichoretic” movement among the Persons of the Trinity, and the same principle summed up by Christ

when He said, “He who finds his life shall lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 10:39).

Lewis’s chapter is extremely rich and many-faceted, and I can’t even pretend to do it justice in a few short remarks. As you may have noticed, it’s in many ways a kind of summary of our entire semester thus far, or a reminder at least of certain key ideas and central themes we’ve touched on along the way. Lewis reminds us, for example, of his objections to the modernist interpretation of the Bible (94). He recalls what we said about the “two poles” of God—namely, transcendence and immanence—when he describes what he calls the “double character of Jahweh” (98). He reviews our discussion of the relationship between Creation and Fall, pointing out that the Fall is rooted in both the original imperfection of the world (104) and a misuse of free will (105). He writes about hamartiology in describing the effects of the Fall on the human microcosm (112). He underscores, throughout the chapter, several key points in the doctrine of the Incarnation itself. And in reflecting on the meaning of death, he anticipates some important ideas we’ll be looking at later when we examine more closely the process of salvation. Lewis also treats his readers to a variety of provocative speculations. Had we more time, it would be especially interesting to discuss his suggestion that the effects of the Incarnation aren’t limited to our planet. This is an idea that fascinated Lewis throughout much of his life, and one he works through in an imaginative way in the second volume of his space trilogy, a superb book called *Perelandra*. For the moment, however, I want to highlight just one of his numerous insights. I need to make sure you’ve felt the full impact of what he says concerning the “composite existence” (95) or “composite nature” (102, 112) of man. This is one of four facts of experience (as he calls them) that he endeavors to interpret in light of the Incarnation—the others being descent/re-ascent (96), selectiveness (100-102), and vicariousness (102).

Lewis’s basic assumption throughout the chapter is that *whatever God does makes sense*. Not of course that human beings could have anticipated God’s actions in advance. An apophatically “hidden super-essential Godhead” (see Lecture 5) can’t help but be full of surprises! Still, once those actions are performed, and once the corresponding doctrines of the faith are revealed, it’s possible to make sense of them logically. In looking at things this way Lewis (as I trust you can see) is in full agreement with St

Thomas Aquinas and the mainstream tradition of Christian thought, which we discussed at the very start of the course. He's not a fideist, someone like Tertullian or Luther who supposes we must blindly believe. On the contrary, Lewis thinks faith and reason should go hand in hand. Even God's miracles are not the startling incongruities or absurdities some Christians may have thought. The miracles, too, must make some sort of sense, conforming in some fashion to a logical pattern. As Lewis sees it, this is true of every miracle described in the Bible. Elsewhere in his book *Miracles* he calls attention, for example, to Christ's transformation of water into wine at the Wedding Feast in Cana (John 2:1-11). Think about it, says Lewis. There's nothing at all contrary to the general pattern of nature in this. Water is all the time becoming wine. Now of course water usually takes the form of rain, which falls from the sky and seeps into the soil and is drawn up by the roots of grape vines, which in turn produce grapes, which ripen and are picked and allowed to ferment—and *voilà!* you get wine. At Cana, Christ simply sped up the process! The same thing is true, says Lewis, when we turn to that "grand" or central miracle called the Incarnation. When we think about it in connection with the facts of ordinary human existence, we see that the doctrine of "God as man" fits in and that in so doing it supplies the key to everything else we know.

Let's link this back to the question of whether there would have been a God-Man even if man hadn't fallen. As I've already noted, in asking whether the Incarnation would have occurred apart from the needs of infralapsarian humanity, we're addressing an issue that's fundamental to understanding the very nature of man. For if the answer is *yes*—if the whole point of creation from the very start was for God to unite Himself with human existence—then our understanding of man is going to be significantly and dramatically altered. If God always meant to be man, we can no longer picture ourselves merely as earthly creatures, existing below God as separate, subordinate, and merely contingent entities. No, we're obliged to look upon every man and every woman as a potential expression of the fullness of God, with Jesus Christ serving as the primary instance, the "first fruits", in the words of St Paul (1 Cor. 15:23)—the first example of His kind on this planet. Now Lewis, mind you, doesn't go quite as far as this. But he does suggest that in experiencing ourselves even now as "embodied spirits", we're given at least a taste of something like the Incarnation.

According to Lewis, “In every human being a wholly supernatural entity is united with a part of Nature” (95). Though this union is not to be placed on the same level as what happened when God became man in Jesus Christ, there’s nonetheless a striking parallel, an “image” of the Incarnation, “the same theme in a very minor key”. What does Lewis have in mind in talking about this “supernatural entity”? What he has in mind is the mind itself. (Notice the similarities with St Augustine’s approach to the Trinity.) Each of us is a “rational animal”—a definition Lewis borrows from Aristotle—a composite reality, in which something immaterial, our power of thought, is joined with something material, a brain. (Think back to what we said earlier about man as a microcosm, embracing and uniting different levels of reality.) The first element, rational thought, is supernatural in the sense that it can’t be explained by strictly natural, physical, or material processes. The “movement of atoms in an astronomer’s cortex”, says Lewis, can never on its own account for the astronomer’s “understanding that there must be a still unobserved planet beyond Uranus” (95). *Mutatis mutandis*, this is true for everyone, and not just astronomers. No movement of atoms in any brain can explain how the person who is attached to that brain comes to “understand necessary relations” or to “acknowledge modes of behavior as universally binding”. Seeing the truth of true propositions—if all men are mortal, and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is *necessarily* mortal—or seeing the *binding* or obligatory nature of the moral law—we should love our neighbors as ourselves—can’t be explained on the basis of biochemistry or neuroscience alone. Atoms are moving all the time in everyone’s brain, generating all sorts of thoughts, but some thoughts are true while others are false, and the atoms themselves can’t account for the difference. On the contrary, our ability to see this difference and to judge and act accordingly must have “come down from Heaven”. Lewis doesn’t make the connection, but a good Scriptural basis for what he’s saying can be found in John 1:9, which speaks of the Divine Word as the Light “which enlightens every man who comes into the world”. The Word that “became flesh” (John 1:14) in Jesus becomes flesh in us too insofar as we’re able to use our brains to do things those brains on their own can’t explain.

Lewis cautiously stops short at this point. But other Christian theologians have boldly gone further, suggesting that our “supernatural” ability to think logically and to

choose morally is just the tip of a “theandric” iceberg (*theos* = “God” + *andros* = the genitive form of a Greek word for “man”). Or, to change the metaphor, this distinctive human ability, they would say, is just a small seed which, if cultivated through obedience to the commands of Christ in the gospels, may grow into a flourishing tree of “mature manhood”, as we come eventually to “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). A good example of theological thinking that takes this further step can be found in the work of Philip Sherrard (1922-95), an Orthodox layman, close friend of Kallistos Ware, and prolific author. Sherrard’s book *Human Image: World Image* is of particular interest in this regard, as he sets about building on the teaching of St Maximos the Confessor, who famously said, “Always and in everything the *Logos* seeks to work the miracle of His Incarnation”. Here are a few representative lines from Sherrard:

“What is here in question is not so much the historical and individual Incarnation of the *Logos* in Jesus of Nazareth as His cosmic Incarnation. But the two are mutually supporting, and the understanding of the one illuminates the understanding of the other.... The Council of Chalcedon described the relationship between the divine and human natures in the God-man. It declared that the two natures are united in Christ inseparably and unconfusedly. Created nature can never not be distinct from the divine nature, though it is important to stress that this distinction is not with respect to the source of its being but only with respect to the particular mode in which it manifests that being. This being is God’s Being; and what is meant when it is said that in the God-man the divine and human are united inseparably is that there is an interpenetration of this Being and the created element of the human. There is a symbiosis between them, even though the two partners of the union are not equal. This in brief is the theandric mystery; and since this mystery, consummated in Christ, is the model according to which we can understand the relationship between the divine and the human as such—for Christ’s human nature is universal—and in individual human beings in particular, we can see how the potentiality in each human being for transfiguration and divinization rests upon definite and explicit ontological ground—on a potentiality intrinsic to human nature, on an inherent capacity to be divinized” (*Human Image: World Image* [Denise Harvey Publishing, 2004], 163-64).

Yes, I know: heady stuff! Trust me, we'll be able to make better sense of these challenging claims once we've had a chance to discuss Chapters 5 and 6 of *The Orthodox Way* and have gained a more precise understanding of what salvation entails—what it presupposes on God's part, what it requires of man, and what its full flowering looks like. In particular we're going to have to spell out what St Paul means in the passage I quoted above from Ephesians by "the fullness of Christ", and what St Peter means when says that the whole point of the Christian life is to become "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). For the moment, however, in bringing this lecture to a close, my aim is simply to get you thinking about these deep and demanding ideas so that, when the time comes, you'll be able to appreciate more fully how Christology, soteriology, and eschatology (Christian teaching about our life after death) are systematically linked.

**Lecture 15:**  
**Pneumatology and Atonement**

We turn now to Chapter 5 of Kallistos Ware's *Orthodox Way* and to a discussion of the Holy Spirit. This is a topic that will require us to look simultaneously both backward and forward. On the one hand, we have to return to our earlier thoughts on the Trinity, but on the other hand, a doctrine of the Spirit (what a theologian calls *pneumatology*) also involves going forward and developing certain points we've only briefly touched on thus far in speaking about Christ and Christology. As usual, systematic theology is concerned with the links among doctrines, and thus with seeing the various aspects of the Christian religion as parts of a single whole. I've observed before that theology is like mathematics in that its ideas build on each other—I called this a “snowball effect”—and we're going to be seeing evidence of that effect once again. In my last lecture I posed the questions (with the help of Ware, Lewis, and Philip Sherrard): What if the Incarnation is not simply something that happened—in the past tense—to Jesus? What if it's something happening—in the present tense—to the rest of us, too? In discussing the Holy Spirit, we'll need to investigate this question of the scope or extent of the Incarnation much more thoroughly as we try to come to a clearer understanding of what exactly it means to be saved.

First of all, though, we need to go back and briefly review what was said on the subject of God as Trinity. The Christian believes, as you know, that a single Divinity exists in three distinct Persons, each of whom is (in Ware's words) a “distinct center of conscious selfhood” and each of whom has existed from all eternity. These Persons are the Father, the Son (also called the *Logos* or Word), and the Holy Spirit, the second of whom, the uncreated Son of God, became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. The Son, however, is only one of the Father's “two hands”, to remind you of the formulation of St Irenaeus. God the Father begets a Son, but He also causes the procession of a Holy Spirit, and these *two* Divine Persons, the Son and the Spirit, are *together* responsible for God's dealings with man. Ware underscores this reciprocal responsibility insofar as it can be seen in the Incarnation of Jesus, His Baptism, and His Transfiguration, as well as in Pentecost and in the Christian life as a whole (92-94). We mustn't forget, though, that the

Son and the Spirit were already working together long “before” the Son ever showed up on this planet as man and long “before” these specific historical events took place (notice, again, my quotation marks). Like the Father, the Son and the Spirit transcend the entire universe, existing beyond both time and space. Whatever the Spirit’s contribution to the Incarnation and human salvation, we need to keep in mind that this same Spirit is also operative on planes of Reality and in worlds we can’t even begin to imagine, and as Ware insists She is operative there as a Person, and not simply as an impersonal or “insentient force” (91).

Now as I hope you just noticed, I used the feminine gender in referring to the Spirit. “*She* (I said) is operative in worlds we can’t even imagine.” I don’t wish to make too much of this point, but it seemed to me it might be of some interest, in this age of increasing gender consciousness, to call your attention to a very interesting notion—the Orthodox would call it a *theologoumenon* or “theological opinion”—that one finds in certain strands of ancient Christian tradition and among certain Church fathers. In discussing “God as mystery”, we stressed the fact that God is intrinsically or inherently beyond all categories, and this of course includes the category of gender. Like the Jew and the Muslim, the Christian traditionally refers to God as “He”, but this obviously doesn’t mean that God is male. On the other hand, in discussing the creation of man, we quoted Genesis 1:26, which tells us that human beings were “created in God’s image and likeness, male and female created He them”. This implies that there must be something within God which, while not itself male or female in the biological sense, nonetheless corresponds to what we mean by masculine and feminine. So from one point of view (you see) God is *neither* gender, but from another point of view “He” is *both*. In order to make sense of the two perspectives, some theologians have proposed that while God the Father is completely beyond this distinction, the Son of God may be understood as “His” masculine aspect and the Holy Spirit as “His” feminine aspect. No theologian (or none at least to my knowledge) has ever suggested that this notion should be defined as an obligatory dogma or that it could ever be shown to be more than speculation. God after all has no body, and “He” is therefore in no way subject to the sexual distinctions with which we’re familiar in terrestrial organisms. And yet, having admitted all that, it’s

nonetheless true that in referring to the Holy Spirit there's a venerable precedent within the Christian tradition for using words that are evocative of feminine qualities.

To borrow from a completely different religion, we could say that the Holy Spirit corresponds to what the Taoists call *Yin*, a quality or cosmic energy they associate with hiddenness, fluidity, elusiveness, and receptivity. (The complementary opposite quality in Taoism is *Yang*, which is connected with the relatively more masculine attributes of openness, solidity, and initiative.) *Yin* is to be found in the structure and function of female animals and human beings, but also in the darkness of night, in the flow of water, and in the elusiveness of the wind. These last two elements in particular are connected in the Bible with the Spirit, beginning in Genesis, where "She" is described as moving over the face of the waters, imagery that suggests a breeze blowing across a lake or the sea. Ware is no Taoist, of course, nor does he use the feminine pronouns, but he has much the same thing in mind when he describes what he calls "the anonymity or, more exactly, the transparency of the Holy Spirit" (94). In any case, I'm going to keep using the feminine gender in this lecture just so you can get a sense of what this way of speaking might feel like. At the same time I should tell you that in the classical languages there's no consensus: in Latin the word for spirit is masculine; in Syriac it's feminine; and in Greek it's neuter. This linguistic fact about these three languages is as good a reminder as any that the reality of the Holy Spirit, like that of the other two Persons, is something that infinitely transcends our comprehension and categories.

On the other hand, when we turn to discussions of the Holy Spirit among Christian theologians, we find that historically there's been a far greater focus on Her immanence than on Her transcendence. The Spirit has been understood primarily in terms of Her inward presence within the created order, and especially in man. Ware alludes to a poem by the Roman Catholic writer Gerard Manley Hopkins (*The Orthodox Way*, 90-91). He doesn't mention the name of the poem, but it's called "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe"—a very beautiful poem, which I highly recommend. It reminded me of another of Hopkins's poems, "God's Grandeur", where the poet speaks of the inward beauty and "freshness" of things. Having lamented the corruption and decay of the fallen world, he continues in a second stanza by saying that nonetheless "nature is never spent / There lives the dearest freshness deep down things / And though the last

lights off the black West went / Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs— /  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah!  
bright wings”. Now admittedly, the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit is brooding *over* the world  
in this passage, like a mother hen over her eggs, and yet the results of that brooding are  
clearly of an “inward” and “interior” kind, as the “deep” fertility and goodness of things  
bubbles up and out and reasserts itself in the midst of decay.

This same emphasis on the presence and inwardness of the Spirit can be seen in  
the Bible. As I mentioned a moment ago, the Spirit comes on the scene very early in  
Scripture, in Genesis 1:2, and the description we find there reinforces Her *yin*-like or  
feminine character, for She’s said to be “moving” like the *wind* “over the face of the  
*waters*”. Then, in the next chapter, Genesis 2, we learn that this same Spirit has a special  
role to play in the creation of man: God “formed man of the dust of the ground, and  
*breathed into* his nostrils the *breath* of life; and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7).  
As I mentioned when we were discussing the inspiration of Scripture in one of my  
introductory lectures, the word for *wind* and *breath* in ancient languages like Hebrew is  
the same word that we translate into English as *spirit*. So in fact what this passage is  
saying, in a kind of play on words, is that Adam came to life as the result of God’s  
“spirit”, the Holy Spirit, entering into him. In fact, it’s God’s Spirit who enters into every  
man and woman when they “become living beings”, and it is She who will leave them (in  
one sense at least) when they “expire”, breathing their last *breath* at the moment of death.

Furthermore, it’s through the inwardness or presence of this same Holy Spirit that  
fallen man is recreated and given new life. To use C. S. Lewis’s image from his chapter  
in the Reader on the Trinity, it’s the *indwelling* of the Holy Spirit that makes the  
“statues” in the toy-maker’s shop come alive (Reader, 57). And this is why, just before  
His ascension, the resurrected Christ “breathed on [His disciples], and said to them,  
Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). We’re entitled by the ancient meaning of these  
words to imagine them “*inhaling*” as He “*exhaled*”, drawing His Spirit/Breath into  
themselves. Finally, ten days later—on what the Christian Tradition calls Pentecost—we  
learn that this same elusive Person dramatically returned, manifesting Herself this time in  
the form of fire, and that the disciples “were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4;  
Ware, 94). Just as at the very beginning in the *creation* of man, so once again in the

*recreation* and transformation of man, the Spirit is distinguished by Her entry within and Her interior presence. It was presumably in light of these basic Biblical facts that Ware chose to describe the Persons of the Trinity in his earlier chapter on that subject by saying that the Father is “God *above or beyond* us”, the Son is “God *with* us”, and the Holy Spirit is “God *within* us” (33).

It therefore makes perfect sense, in discussing the Holy Spirit, for the Christian theologian to spend most of his time examining the Spirit’s work *in* and effect *on* man’s life, and I plan to follow that traditional precedent here, using this chapter of Ware and the corresponding selections in the Reader to clarify and develop certain points concerning the process of salvation. In my opinion, Ware himself has done a perfectly adequate job, in the first part of Chapter 5, in describing what the Holy Spirit is like, and I see no point in going over his ground. What makes better sense is to pick up on some of his suggestions in the second half of the chapter and to focus my comments on what he calls “the continuation of Christ’s Incarnation within the life of the Church” (93). This continuation, says Ware, is the work of the Spirit. But what exactly does that mean and what precisely is the relationship between the Holy Spirit’s contribution and the work of the God-Man Himself? I began raising these important questions at the end of my last lecture, and it’s upon such questions that I’d like to concentrate here.

In order to do that, however, we need to back up and get a running start. We need to return to our discussion of Christology and say a bit more than we have so far about the Son’s role as man’s savior.

In examining the traditional picture of Christ, we were concerned primarily, as you know, with III.B. of our outline, with the question of who or what Christ is. When it came to Christ’s function and deeds, III.A., we left things rather open-ended, saying only that He must act in such a way as to reverse all the effects of the Fall, repeating (above all) the Divine act of creation in restoring immortality to mortal man. (It was in connection with this creative act, remember, that the Arian Christ fell short.) But *how* Christ does this, we didn’t really explain. There’s a good reason we didn’t. For as it turns out there’s never been a dogmatic or official statement as to what a Christian should believe about Christ’s saving work in the same way as there have been official formulations as to what a Christian must believe about His Person and natures.

Christology has been formally codified in great detail, as we saw in discussing the Ecumenical Councils, but for the most part soteriology hasn't. All Christians certainly believe in what theologians call the *atonement*. They believe, in other words, that Christ's incarnate deeds have had the effect of restoring the original state of unity between God and man, bringing them back to a point of being "at one" with each other (hence the word "at-one-ment"). But not all Christians understand this atonement in the same way.

Speaking in very rough and general terms, there have been two basic soteriological schools of thought, based upon two distinct theories of the atonement. The first school thinks of the process in more or less legalistic and juridical terms, and it stresses the sacrificial nature of Christ's actions. According to this model Christ came into the world so as to pay the price demanded by God the Father as a punishment for the sins of mankind. Man had broken the Divine law, and the justice of God required the payment of a penalty, namely, death. The first human beings had been told that if they disobeyed God and ate from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die (see Gen. 3:3). Nonetheless they *did* eat—Eve first and then Adam—and therefore they died, for in the words of St Paul, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). In keeping with the Old Testament understanding of sacrifice, this theory goes on to propose that the only One who could properly pay these "wages", in such a way that the penalty of death might be canceled for everyone, must Himself have been sinless and undeserving of death and that His own dying must have therefore been sacrificial in character. This model therefore focuses above all on Christ's passion and death. Good Friday and the Crucifixion are central, for it was on the Cross that Christ "paid the price" demanded by God the Father and thus accomplished the main work of salvation. This way of looking at things is sometimes referred to as the Latin theory of the atonement since it was stressed above all in the Latin West during the Middle Ages, notably in a classic work by St Anselm (1033-1109) called *Cur Deus Homo*, "Why Did God Become Man?" It's also known as the satisfaction theory, since the idea is that God's demand for justice had to be fulfilled or satisfied. I dare say that most of you in this class who are Christian have grown up thinking primarily in terms of this perspective, because it's the model of the atonement most commonly emphasized among Catholics and conservative Protestants.

But there's also a second school of thought, a second way of looking at the atonement, with ancient precedent as well. In this case, the main images and ideas are drawn, not from a court of law and judicial proceedings, but from warfare and battle, and Christ is presented, not as a sacrificial offering or victim who pays a legal debt, but as a conquering, vanquishing king, beating down the forces of evil and death and opening the way for man's entry into Heaven. In the Anselmian theory, the principal aim of Christ's work is to satisfy God's rightful demand for justice, and death is envisioned as a Divine instrument for exacting the appropriate penalty. Something or someone had to be sacrificed because that's the way God had set things up at the start. Jesus had to die to conform to the original decree. In this second model, however, death is pictured instead as the enemy (not the instrument) of God, a force to be defeated and destroyed. This way of understanding the atonement is sometimes referred to as the *Christus Victor*, or "Christ the Conqueror", model, and broadly speaking it's a model more favored among theologians of the Christian East, whose viewpoint is in general less legalistic than its western counterpart. What is emphasized in this case is not so much Good Friday but Easter—not (or not solely) Christ's Crucifixion but His Resurrection. (Catholics, it's sometimes observed, have crucifixes depicting the three-dimensional *corpus* of Christ in such a way as to stress the bloodiness and horror of His death, whereas Eastern Orthodox iconography tends to paint Christ in such a way that, even in the midst of death, He remains very much a glorious and sovereign King.) Like His many healing miracles and exorcisms, the Resurrection is proof of the God-Man's power. It's where He demonstrates His invincibility over the forces of corruption and evil. In this model, the point is not so much that Christ was *undeserving* of death, but rather that He could not be *destroyed* by death.

Now as anyone familiar with the Bible knows, both of these ways of looking at the atonement have a solid basis in the New Testament scriptures, and they're by no means contradictory or mutually exclusive. This is undoubtedly why they've never been officially ranked in some creed. Speaking once again very generally and simplistically, you could say that the synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—tend to describe Christ's work more in terms of sacrifice, whereas the Gospel of John seems to favor the picture of Christ as a conqueror. Of course the foundations for both schools of thought

can be found in all the gospels, as they can also in the letters of St Paul. Paul preaches “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2) and stresses that this is the necessary redemptive payment for the sins of mankind. But at the same time Paul is adamant that “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). Good Friday is necessary, but it’s not sufficient unless it’s followed by Easter. What this complementarity helps one to see—this is extremely important—is that Christ’s contribution to the process of salvation is really single, however much our theories may complicate it. He *conquers* death, as the “Christus Victor” theory says He must, precisely by *submitting* to it, as the satisfaction theory says He must. In the words of one of the Orthodox *troparia* or hymns: “When Thou [O Christ] didst submit Thyself unto death, O Thou deathless and immortal One, then Thou didst destroy hell [that is, the place of the dead] with Thy Godly power, raising the dead from beneath the earth” (“Troparion of the Resurrection”, Tone 2).

This paradoxical idea is very clear, for example, in Revelation 5. The question is asked, “Who is worthy to open the book [of Life], and to loose the seals thereof?” (Rev. 5:2), and the answer is given, “Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed” (Rev. 5:5). But when the writer turns in the very next verse to see this magnificent, victorious Lion, what he discovers in the midst of the elders is “a lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rev. 5:6). In fact, you see, *the Lamb and the Lion are one and the same Reality as viewed from two different perspectives*. To return to something we learned in discussing the Ecumenical Councils, this is precisely why the Tradition stresses the *communicatio idiomatum*, or sharing of properties, between the two natures, and why it insists in so doing on the otherwise outrageous claim that God Himself died when Jesus was crucified. For only if the One who enters into death as a sacrifice can bring Himself out again as a conqueror can death be finally undone and defeated and the problem of mortality solved. Speaking of outrageous claims, I recently came across a hymn written in the early twentieth century called “It was on a Friday Morning”. It can be found in the *Army-Navy Hymnal*. It takes this idea that the Lamb *is* the Lion, and that the sacrifice is none other than that of God Himself, to an extreme you may not have imagined before. I’ll show you the lyrics in class, and as you’ll see there is indeed a deep, deep Mystery here.

In any case—after this important digression—I need to circle back to my main point in all this, which has to do with the respective roles of the Son and the Spirit. I’ve focused in the last few paragraphs on Christ’s atoning work as man’s savior. But however you prefer to think about that work—whether you picture Him as a sacrifice, a conqueror, or a perfect blend of the two—what you have to realize (says the Christian tradition) is that He does *not* Himself complete the process of salvation. Neither the Lamb nor the Lion, nor both together, are the whole saving story. This may seem at first a very strange thing to say—what sort of Savior is it who does not fully save?—but it’s an absolutely crucial point for correctly understanding Christian doctrine. Christ gets the process started, of course. He makes it possible for II.B. to be changed back to II.A., and His Crucifixion and Resurrection are essential (says Christianity) if the effects of the Fall are to be reversed. Nevertheless, though these great atoning deeds are necessary, they’re not sufficient. Something more is required. What Christ has done—we could say—is to provide a sort of saving potential. His victorious submission, or if you prefer His submissive victory, has released a new kind of energy into the world, and the presence of this energy has ensured that transformation is possible and that man may now escape from his fallen condition. But this potential or possibility must still be actualized if it’s to have its intended effect, and if that’s to happen it’s crucial that the energy released by the incarnate Son of God should be assimilated or appropriated by those who need it. This precisely is where the Holy Spirit comes in. For it is “Her” role in the Divine plan to operate *inwardly* and *invisibly* within human beings so as to build upon what Christ has done *outwardly* and in this way to bring His work to completion or perfection in an actual salvation.

We get just a taste of these complementary roles in the Upper Room discourse in the Gospel of John. Chapters 13 through 17 of the Fourth Gospel should be read in their entirety to understand fully what I have in mind, but I want to call your attention to just three verses now. In the first, John 14:12, Jesus tells His disciples that whoever “believes in me will do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father”. However you interpret this passage, and it’s rather cryptic to say the least, Christ’s promise is altogether remarkable. In considering His “works”, we would obviously have to include, not only such comparatively minor things (!) as stilling storms

and healing the blind, but the two greatest deeds of all—those of which I was just speaking above: His sinless sacrifice and His victorious resurrection. The reader is therefore left wondering at this point what Christ could possibly be talking about. How are mere human beings supposed to accomplish such deeds as He performed, to say nothing of even “greater works”? More curiously yet, one wonders what the point was in saying that these greater things would come about only “because I go to the Father”. What does Christ’s departure—His ascension to Heaven (Acts 1:9)—have to do with it?

I don’t pretend to be able to explain everything about this verse. Who could? But I think an important key is provided when we remember what was said earlier this semester about the *perichoresis*, or “circular dance”, in which the three Persons of the Trinity eternally participate—how it is that they *give way* to each other, not clinging to their respective places. The Second Person’s return to the First Person (“I go to the Father”) seems to be an application of this principle. We see this is so two chapters later, when Christ goes on to explain to His doubtless befuddled disciples that His impending departure is intended to open up a space in the world in which the Third Person can operate. What I’m thinking of is John 16:7, where Christ speaks as follows: “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor [some translations say “the Comforter”] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send the Counselor to you.” Who is this mysterious Counselor? The context makes it clear that it’s none other than the Holy Spirit, who “will guide you”, says Christ—in yet a third crucial verse—“into all the truth” (John 16:12). So, putting these verses together, we get the following picture. The incarnate Son of God, nearing the end of His stay on this planet, speaks of the works He has done and of those He shall yet do before His departure, including His impending passion, death, and resurrection. But at the same time He refers to works of an even greater kind that will be accomplished, He says, by His disciples themselves, though only after *He* has gone away and the *Spirit* has come: works that will become possible for them precisely because of that Spirit’s assistance.

What could these “greater works” be?

I can only begin addressing that question in this lecture. To get us moving in the right direction, however, I want to leave you with one further, very important theological distinction—a distinction between two different “stages” or “phases” of salvation:

*justification* and *sanctification*. Different branches of Christianity may use different terms for these stages, and they may divide them up into additional, smaller steps, but whatever one's perspective might be, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox, every serious Christian agrees that salvation is a *process* and not simply an instantaneous change. Of course, the process may be said to begin all at once, in an initial conversion or act of repentance, and this is what many Christians have in mind when they talk about being "born again" or "accepting Christ". But that's not the whole story. As we'll begin discussing more fully next time, a complete and total transformation of the fallen self takes time, for it requires "working out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). And it's finally completed—and for most of us that's not going to be in this life—only when a person has become "perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). How many *perfect* Christians do you know?

Theologians often refer to the first stage in this transformative process with the term *justification*. As the word implies, this stage is concerned with justice or moral righteousness, and it's sometimes used in a fairly narrow or legalistic way in relation to God's law. Man must be "made right" before that law and in terms of its demands, and he *is* made right or justified through his faith in the power of Christ's sinless death on the Cross. Thus according to St Paul, man is "justified by grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by His blood, to be received by faith" (Rom. 3: 24-25). I myself prefer to use the term in a somewhat broader and more encompassing sense, to include everything Christ has done in providing or releasing what I called earlier a "saving potential"—including not only the Crucifixion as such, but also both His prior teaching and miracles and His subsequent Resurrection. Justification in this larger sense includes all that's involved in the restoration of man's original, supralapsarian integrity or wholeness. By means of His many saving acts Christ has made possible one's journey toward this wholeness or completeness. He has atoned for man's sin, overcoming the legal disjunction between man and God through His death, while at the same time providing Christians with an enlightened teaching and a supreme example of Edenic humanity. And He's also made Himself present on a continuing basis in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, thus

ensuring that man will be fortified in his journey by a celestial elixir, an antidote against the forces of corruption that will besiege him in this world.

Make no mistake: no Christian would ever say that there's anything trivial or second rate about these saving deeds or their earth-shattering effect on man's destiny. At the same time, however, it would be a theological mistake to suppose that what has happened in the past, because of Christ's work, is all that needs to happen—that there's no continuing process in the present and leading on to the future. On the contrary, to refer once again to the words of Jesus Himself, there are even "greater works" to be done, something that still remained to be finished when Christ left the world to return to His Father. This, as many theologians use the term, is where *sanctification* comes in, a second stage of salvation, one that is superintended and guided by God the Father's other "hand", the Holy Spirit. Although salvation is made *possible* by the first stage in this total process—by justification—it becomes completed or *actual* only when a person is finally made holy (that's what "sanctification" means). Sanctification presupposes justification, but it goes even further. How *much* further will be the subject in part of my next lecture. Stay tuned.

**Lecture 16:**  
**Perspectives on Sin and the Possibility of *Theosis***

In my last lecture, I introduced the subject of pneumatology, the term theologians use to describe their study of the Holy Spirit. I reviewed very briefly our considerations of the Trinity and reminded you that, according to traditional Christian doctrine, the Spirit is one of three distinct centers of Divine self-consciousness. Like the other two centers, the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is at once transcendent and immanent. The focus of theological thinking, however, has always been on the Spirit's immanence, its interior and invisible presence in the world and in man. This helps to explain why some Christian thinkers have suggested that the Spirit represents a feminine dimension in God. With this in mind I likened the Spirit to what the Taoists call *Yin*, a form of energy or mode of being that expresses itself in the fluidity of water and the elusiveness of the wind. It's no accident, I suggested, that when the Holy Spirit first comes on the scene in the Bible, "She" is moving like the wind over the face of the waters, nor is it just a coincidence when Ware speaks of "Her" anonymity and transparency.

I went on to consider the relationship between the Son and the Spirit, the "two hands of God", in the process of salvation. I talked first about two perspectives on Christian soteriology, each rooted in a different theory of the atonement. The first of these perspectives is based on the Latin, Anselmian, or sacrificial view of Christ's saving work. The signature idea in this case is that Christ came into the world in order to satisfy God's demand for justice by dying an undeserved death on the Cross. The second is based on the *Christus Victor* model of Christ's accomplishments. From this point of view the *sine qua non* of salvation was for the Son of God to conquer and destroy death through His resurrection. Not that we have to choose between them: these perspectives are complementary, not contradictory, as we can see in the Bible itself. Christ acts as man's Savior both by submitting to death and by compelling death to submit to Him. In a single and decisive action, He enters death even as death enters Him, and the result is that the very substance or nature of death is transformed, such that man can now pass through its portal unharmed. In the words of St Athanasius, "The solidarity of mankind is such

that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all" (*On the Incarnation*, Ch. 9).

On the other hand—and here I returned to the Spirit—however multi-faceted and central Christ's action, it's not the only soteriological requirement. Christ's saving work is necessary, but not sufficient. Something more was needed if the problems resulting from sin and evil were to be completely solved, something Christ Himself acknowledged near the end of His time on earth when He told His disciples to expect "another Comforter" (John 14:16). This led to my distinguishing two stages in the process of human transformation: *justification* and *sanctification*. The first of these terms refers to an initial and foundational stage of salvation: it was necessary that man be restored to his original, paradisiacal state of justice and rectitude, and this the Son made possible by releasing or unleashing what I've called a saving "energy". But the fact that this energy is now abroad in the world is quite without consequence unless it's effectively assimilated or appropriated by those who require its assistance. There must be an inner complement or counterpart to the external works of Christ, something going on *within* human nature, by virtue of which man is enabled to respond in the appropriate ways to Christ's work. Here is where the Holy Spirit enters the picture, in order to empower human beings to accomplish what Christ labels even "greater works" than His own—greater inasmuch as they lead to the further, and higher, stage of sanctification, holiness, or perfection. Thus we can say, with St Gregory of Nyssa, that salvation "passes through the Son and is brought to completion by the Holy Spirit" (*On Not Three Gods*).

It might be of interest, particularly to those who've taken or will be taking my course on world religions, Religious Studies 120, to point out that these two stages or phases of salvation have their counterparts in other religions. In certain pre-Christian Greek and Roman religions, for example, a similar distinction was made between the lesser mysteries and the greater mysteries. So also in Hinduism and Sufism (to pick just two other cases) we find the same basic idea, namely, that the complete transformation of man requires that he first be restored to primordial innocence in order that he might then be lifted to the even higher stage of sharing in the uncreated qualities of God Himself. The Hindus describe the second, higher phase as *moksha* or liberation, and the person who reaches that state is a *mukta*, meaning one who is free—free from illusion and from

the cycle of reincarnation. Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, speaks of the higher stage as *fana* or extinction—the extinction of all egoistic tendencies—and the person who attains it is the *sufi* or pure one.

But let's focus now on the second and higher of these two stages as it's understood and explained within the Christian tradition. I've said that it's the responsibility of the Holy Spirit, building on the justification supplied by the Son, to assist in the sanctification or perfection of man. But what does this perfection consist in? What do Christians have in mind when they speak about holiness, sanctification, or deification, and how is this ultimate human state to be described? In order to answer these questions we need to back up, returning to what we were saying a few sessions ago on the subject of sin. (As always in systematic theology, it's important to be aware of the close links between doctrines.) Obviously what you believe about the effects of sin on human nature is going to determine how and what you think about the possibility and the degree of human perfection. We find once again that there are significant differences on this issue between the Christian East and the Christian West.

All Christians believe that man is “fallen”. Whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox, they believe something happened to distort or corrupt the human microcosm and that mankind is therefore in need of salvation. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), in the words of St Paul. The untempered emotions, obsequious will, ignorant mind, and mortal body of infralapsarian humanity require healing and transformation, the transformation Jesus Christ initiates by His saving works on Good Friday and Easter. But now here comes the difference. All Christians *don't* have the same view as to precisely how this distortion first comes about in a person, nor do they agree on how deeply infected any given person may be. They all agree that man sins, but they don't agree as to why, and when it comes to understanding how sin is transmitted and how completely it may have rooted itself in our nature, there are important differences within this religion. Very broadly put, the differences are basically as follows.

In the West, among both Catholics and Protestants, it's commonly said that the sin of the first human beings, Adam and Eve, has been passed down through all their descendents—down, down through all the generations that have ever lived on this

planet—with the result that all of us even today are “born into sin”. In fact, even *before* we are born, from the very moment of our conception in our mother’s womb, our souls are tainted by the guilt of that very first sin in Eden. St Augustine believed that sin was transmitted through sexual intercourse, and since that’s obviously how we all got started, we can’t help but enter into the world already marked as sinners and deserving God’s punishment. (I hope you can see how this fits into the Augustinian theodicy; see Lecture 10.) The Protestant Reformer John Calvin (1509-64) taught much the same thing, though he expressed it in political, not biological, terms. According to Calvin, Adam was the legal representative of the rest of mankind, like a senator or congressman, and when he cast his original “vote”, as it were, he was casting it for all of us. Calvin’s point was simply that in acting against God Adam implicated the whole human race in the consequences of his choice. Whichever way one pictures it, whether like Augustine or Calvin, this is the doctrine known as *original sin*. The essential claim of the doctrine is that everyone enters the world already guilty in the sight of God. Sin has *affected* and *infected* our very nature, and man is basically rotten to the core. He is, in the language of Calvinism, totally depraved. The Protestant Synod of Dort, meeting in the early seventeenth century, insisted on the idea of total depravity as one of the essential articles of the Christian faith. (I’ll say more about this in Lecture 18.)

The perspective of the Orthodox Christian East is very different. In the Eastern understanding of things, man is certainly born into sin, but this doesn’t mean that he’s born as a sinner. He enters into a context where the effects of sin are around him, but sin itself is not yet—and it need never be—in him. The East completely agrees with the West that the sin of Adam has had cosmic and long-ranging consequences, and that because of the primal disobedience described in Genesis 3—whether one thinks of this in historical or mythical terms—the world is now full of corruption and no longer under man’s rule as was intended by God. The terrestrial situation we’re obliged to live in is distracting, painful, and dangerous, and we’re constantly barraged by forces and constrained by conditions that have the underlying effect of leading us further and further away from God. Nevertheless, as the Orthodox see it, sin itself is always a matter of personal responsibility: one can’t be held accountable for another’s failings. Western teaching about inherited guilt is therefore strongly rejected, and all the more the Calvinist idea of

total depravity. From the Eastern point of view, no matter how great the impact of sin on man's nature and no matter how much an individual himself may sin, there remains within him, at his very center, a continuing kernel of purity and hence a continuing possibility for growth toward perfection. This possibility is related to what St Paul calls "the inner man", in which he continues to "delight in the law" despite the "war" going on in his "members" (Rom. 7:22-23), and it may be understood as residing in the human *pneuma* (spirit), the highest of man's three constitutive parts.

I mustn't spend too much more time on this point, but I wanted to mention, for those of you especially who may have studied classical languages, that the difference of perspective I'm sketching here seems to be based, at least in part, on a subtle difference in the meaning of another verse in Paul's letter to the Romans, a difference that depends on whether the verse is read in the Greek original or in Latin translation. If you go looking for the most influential of all Western writers on this whole subject of sin, everybody agrees that St Augustine's your man. Now as it happens, Augustine's knowledge of Greek was very poor, so he was obliged to use the Vulgate—the traditional Latin text of the Bible. When he came to Romans 5:12, what he read (translating the Latin words literally into English) was this: "As sin came into the world through one man *in whom [in quo]* all men sinned, and through sin, death, so death spread to all men." This is a rather curious syntactical construction, I realize, and the Latin may be subject to more than one interpretation, but what Augustine at any rate concluded from the text was that *all* human beings must in some sense have been already present *in* the man who committed the first sin, in other words in Adam. Insofar as Adam was the head of the race, the father of us all, we were there in potential within him—in his "loins", as it is sometimes said—and when he sinned we therefore sinned as well. Given this assumption, it wasn't too large a step for Augustine to conclude that there must be some sort of universal human guilt, inevitably transmitted from Adam to us.

Interestingly enough, however, the phrase I italicized in the quotation from Romans 5:12 above—"in whom", which is *in quo* in the Vulgate—is the Latin translation of a phrase in the original Greek of the passage that means something quite different. To be technical, the Latin *in quo* is a phrase combining a preposition and a relative pronoun, and it's an attempt to translate the Greek words *epi ho* (by elision from *epi + ho*), which

are also a preposition and pronoun. Unlike the Latin, though, where the pronoun *quo* can be either masculine or neuter, the Greek pronoun *ho* has to be neuter, and when a neuter pronoun is used in this way with the preposition *epi* what the phrase actually means is “because of which” or “on account of which”. Thus, when you plug the phrase back into the Biblical passage, what you get in the English is this: “As sin came into the world through one man, and through sin, death, so death spread to all men, *because of which* [*epi ho*] all men sinned.” In this case the antecedent of the pronoun is “death”, not the “one man”. What Paul is saying is that the presence of death and corruption in the world is what prompts men to sin. We’re born into a world conditioned by the effects of sin, and this is what leads us to sin in turn, though without initially being sinners ourselves. Grammatical technicalities aside, it’s this way of looking at things, the way supported by the original Greek of the Scriptures, which is favored by the Orthodox Tradition. As you may remember, Ware touched briefly on this issue back in his chapter on “God as Creator” (see 61-62).

But let’s come back to where I was earlier, the topic of salvation, and to the idea of it’s having two distinct stages or phases. Given their differing perspectives on sin, it’s only natural that Christians of the West and the East have tended to look at salvation in somewhat different ways, too. In the West, where original sin is stressed, there tends to be a corresponding stress on the first stage of salvation, on justification, together with a greater emphasis on the work of Christ than on the work of the Spirit. Speaking simplistically, one finds that Catholics and Protestants generally have a more pessimistic view of human nature, and because of this fact they tend to concentrate more on moral or juridical categories, being interested mainly in what has been done to rectify man’s legal standing with God. The second stage of sanctification isn’t necessarily ignored or rejected, but in a sense it’s postponed—put on the back burner, if you will. The really pressing matter for Catholics and Protestants is what can be done about human depravity. This in itself is enough to occupy one’s faith for a lifetime. If one day, in Heaven, there comes something further or higher, a real change in man’s nature and not just a dismissal of his case by the Divine Judge, that’s fine. For Protestants in particular, however, this higher possibility is not something to be expected on earth. Martin Luther, for example, believed that the only thing a Christian can do is simply accept the gift of Christ’s

righteousness, which God graciously “imputes” or attributes to sinners, by a kind of fiction, even though they are just as sinful as they were before. Luther rather graphically compared Christians to snow-covered dung.

Understand: I’m generalizing here. There are definitely Western exceptions to this rule. I’m thinking for instance of John Wesley (1703-91), father of the Methodist church, who explicitly and very deliberately taught a doctrine he called Christian perfection or entire sanctification. You can see his influence in a number of the Protestant holiness churches today, a good example of which is the Wesleyan Church (named after the “father” himself). Here’s what they say in their *Church Constitution*, Article X: “We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration [this is their word for the first stage of salvation], by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by the Holy Spirit [note the Spirit’s connection with the second stage] and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service.” The *Constitution* then adds that this higher degree of salvation is known as “Christian perfection”, “baptism with the Holy Spirit”, “the fullness of the blessing”, and “Christian holiness”. So yes, there are some Protestant and other Western exceptions to the simplistic rule I’m propounding. By and large, however, Augustine’s reading of Romans has had a profound effect on both Catholics and Protestants and continues to make itself felt to this day in their wish to silence, or at least to bracket, larger claims as to the possibility of human perfection.

In the Orthodox Church, however, it’s a very different story. As we’ve seen, Orthodoxy begins with a far more optimistic estimate of man. Though we live in a world (in Ware’s words) where it’s “easy to do evil and hard to do good” (62), it’s not necessary for us to do evil, nor is it impossible for us to do good. Nobody ever *had* to sin, neither Adam nor any of his posterity, and in fact the Orthodox would say that there have been a few rare human beings who never *did* sin, including—most importantly—the Blessed Virgin Mary. Christ Himself, of course, implies as much when He says, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). There would have been no point in His making this

distinction if the category called “righteous” were an empty set. As for those who *have* sinned—and that certainly includes the vast majority of human beings—Orthodox teaching would be that even in their case, even in the case of fallen men and women, there remains an unfallen center, a center which—with the assistance of the Holy Spirit—may once again reassert its authority over the rest of the self. If and when that should happen, it’s possible for a man or woman to become perfect, even while still alive in this fallen world.

When I speak in this context of perfection, what I’m talking about is the Eastern Christian doctrine of *deification*. Ware has been referring to this concept ever since the very first chapter of *The Orthodox Way*, and we encounter the idea, though not the word itself, in the present chapter, Chapter 5, when he speaks about the “continuation of Christ’s Incarnation” (93). Deification is a translation of a Greek term, *theosis*, which comes in turn from *theos*, the word (as you know) for God. The rationale behind the doctrine is this: if perfection is possible, then whatever else it might look like, it must involve in some way our participation in the only absolutely perfect Reality there is, namely God. Therefore, however inflated the claim may sound at first hearing, it must be possible (say the Orthodox) for a human being to be granted a share in the Divine life itself. Even as God became man in Jesus of Nazareth, with no diminution or distortion of His Divinity—recall the language of Chalcedon: the two natures were joined “without confusion”—so man may enter into God, with no compromise to his humanity, but rather for the sake of perfecting that humanity, making it what it always should have been in the first place. This, the Orthodox reason, is simply a logical corollary to the Christological doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Thus St Irenaeus can say, “God became all that we are so that we might become all that He is”; similarly St Athanasius boldly proclaims, “God became man in order that man might become God”; or yet again, in what is perhaps even more startling language, St Basil the Great (c. 330 - 79) insists that “man is a creature under orders to be God”.

Now we have to be very cautious at this juncture lest we end up grossly misunderstanding the point of view of these saints. As you may know, the Mormon church—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints—also teaches that a sort of deification is possible. What this means in their case, however, is that an individual man

or woman may become an independent god or goddess, having the power to create his or her own universe and populate it with their spiritual children. Mormons in fact are polytheists, believing in the existence of many deities, each of whom (they say) was once a human being like us, but who evolved to the point of becoming Divine. God Himself—the God of the universe we currently live in—was once as we are, and we can one day be as He is. This sectarian claim is totally different, however, from the point of view of traditional Eastern Christianity. When Orthodox Christians speak of *theosis*, it doesn't refer to people becoming gods in such a way as to rival the status of God. It means instead that human beings come to share in the powers, energies, and properties of Divinity while remaining nonetheless fully human and forever subject to God as their rightful Lord.

Ware will explain this idea more precisely in Chapter 6, in a section called “Union with God” (beginning on p. 124). I don't want to go into those details right now, but as you'll see when you read this section he's very careful to insist that *theosis* is not “according to essence”, for this would mean that man's humanity disappears and that he simply merges with God. Nor is it “according to *hypostasis*”, for this would mean that each divinized man becomes an additional Person of God and that the Trinity would become a Myriad, a “Millionarity”, or however many you'd need to fit the new Persons in—which seems to be related to the Mormon conception. Rather divinization is “according to energy”, or—in light of our discussion of the Ecumenical Councils—we could also say “according to property”. Man doesn't replace God, nor does he add a new Person to God, but instead he shares God's properties, notably the Divine power over nature and death. The fully divinized, perfected, or sanctified man or woman is the person who's no longer subject to any creature or created force, but only to God.

I realize this way of looking at salvation is going to seem very strange to Christians who were raised within a Western context. In fact I've sometimes heard Protestant critics go so far as to say that the doctrine of *theosis* is a pagan notion, having nothing to do with authentic “Biblical” Christianity. As it happens, however, several passages in the New Testament may be cited in support of the Orthodox view. I'll discuss a few of these in class, but if you'd like to read them for yourself in advance, they are as follows, ranging from the merely suggestive to what would seem quite definitive: Matt.

5:48, John 10:30-36, John 17:22-23, 2 Pet. 1:2-4, Col. 1:15-19, Col. 2:9, Eph. 3:14-19, Eph. 4:13-15, and Col. 1:24. All of these verses may be taken as evidence, say the Orthodox, that salvation is a process—a gradual and spiritually demanding process, of course—in which a person passes “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18), up to a point finally where he begins to participate in the very powers of God, a participation made possible (to circle back to our main topic in this chapter) by the Holy Spirit.

Are you surprised? Perplexed? Scandalized? Intrigued? Delighted? Let’s talk.

**Lecture 17:**  
**Saints as Fruits of the Spirit**

I come to the last of my lectures on the Holy Spirit. Of course most of our time has been spent, not on the Spirit *per se*, but on trying to understand the Third Person's work upon and within human nature. We've placed our emphasis on the Spirit's immanence, especially on "Her" transformative presence in man, and this has led us to focus on the meaning and stages of Christian salvation. Two classes ago this involved a discussion of the atonement, and we saw that there have been two schools of thought on this subject: one stressing Christ's passion and sacrifice on Good Friday; another emphasizing His victorious resurrection on Easter, these of course being two sides of one coin. Christ is able to save man (says the Christian) precisely insofar as He enters into death to destroy it. However we think of Christ's contribution—whether as two distinct actions or as two modes of one action—it constitutes what I've called the first phase of salvation. Christ's work has the effect of justifying man before God and thus returning him to his original or primordial state. But salvation (says the Tradition) means more than just this. It includes a second stage as well, a stage of sanctification, in which man passes beyond the purely moral rectitude of pre-fallen Eden to a higher stage of perfection and participation in God.

Not all Christians stress this higher stage, however. With that in mind, I concentrated on some major differences between the Western and Eastern perspectives. In the West it is usually taught—following St Augustine—that man is born a sinner, having inherited the guilt of Adam and Eve, and because of this the West tends to concentrate on the means by which man can be justified. In the East, however, the teaching is otherwise: man is born into a sinful environment, but without himself necessarily sinning, and because of this more positive evaluation of human nature, the East has traditionally been willing to go further and to speak in more detail, and with a greater confidence, about the higher stage of salvation—a stage designated in Orthodox Christianity by the Greek term *theosis*, meaning "deification", a stage I compared to the *moksha* or liberation of Hinduism and to the *fana* or extinction of Sufism. Finally, in concluding last time, I directed your attention to some key Biblical passages that support

this idea of *theosis*. According to Orthodoxy, all the texts I cited are to be taken as proofs of the claim that salvation is a process leading to nothing less than a genuine participation in the very powers or energies of God, a participation made possible by the inward action of the Holy Spirit.

At this point we need to look at the selections in our Reader. The first is a short biography of St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), a medieval Roman Catholic saint—by, as it happens, another saint whom we’ve encountered before: Bonaventure. The second is a sermon by (as usual) C. S. Lewis.

My reason for having you read about a saint should be fairly obvious in the context provided by the last two lectures. In studying the life of a person like St Francis one can begin to grasp the deeper meaning or existential import of the Christian doctrine of salvation, seeing it in a more direct and concrete way than the abstract words of a theological treatise allow for. A saint is someone whom a religious tradition honors as an example of the full fruits of salvation and as an encouragement and model for the rest of the faithful. In my introductory course—Religious Studies 120—I discuss the lives and teachings of saints from several traditions: Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Native American, and the aim in that case as well is to taste as it were the full flavor of perfection. When it comes to the Christian religion, there are numerous exemplary figures whose lives we might explore. But I chose Francis for two reasons. First, I didn’t want you to come away thinking, after my last lecture, that the Christian East was alone in recognizing or honoring the highest of spiritual gifts and attainments. The East certainly stresses the second stage of salvation more than the West, but no one group of Christians has a monopoly on holiness. Based on my theological studies over the years and on my own experience as a practicing Christian, it seems to me that Orthodoxy offers the fullest and most complete *picture* of man’s highest state and that it provides the greatest sacramental and spiritual support for its faithful in their journey toward perfection in God. That, in a nutshell, is why I’m Orthodox. But it obviously doesn’t follow that only the Orthodox can reach this state.

I decided on St Francis for a second reason as well. I find that he very nicely exemplifies both of the two “spirit-bearing” figures whom Ware describes in our chapter (95ff). It’s clear from Bonaventure’s biography that Francis was both a spiritual father

and a fool for Christ. Regarding his role as a father or guide, we learn that Francis was responsible for the spiritual direction of an entire religious order that he himself founded: the Order of Friars Minor. As you may know, this remains today one of the principal Roman Catholic religious societies, which (appropriately enough) we call the Franciscans, an order originally authorized—as you learn from the reading—by Pope Innocent III (1160-1216). To all the members of this brotherhood, says Bonaventure, St Francis became “a father in Christ” (119). This role he played right up until the end of his life: as the moment of death drew near, Francis “spoke to [the brothers] with fatherly affection, consoling them for his death and exhorting them to love God. He bequeathed to them poverty and peace” (139-40). It’s revealing to compare these descriptions with what Ware says about the spiritual father, the *starets* or *geron*, in *The Orthodox Way* (95-96).

At the same time St Francis is also a classic example of what Christianity means by the fool for Christ. Ware says of this second, most enigmatic figure that he “carries the act of *metanoia* or ‘change of mind’ [see Rom. 12:2] to its farthest extent. More radically than anyone else, he stands the pyramid on its head. He is a living witness to the truth that Christ’s kingdom is not of this world; he testifies to the reality of the ‘anti-world’, to the possibility of the impossible. He practices an absolute voluntary poverty, identifying himself with the humiliated Christ” (98-99). Francis fills this bill perfectly. I’m thinking for example of his utter disregard for social conventions, the way he would literally strip himself naked for the poor (115, 117). Bonaventure admits that on at least one occasion, “when the children saw his haggard looks, they thought that he was out of his mind” (116). We’re told, furthermore, that “in the purity of his blameless conscience [Francis] experienced such an infusion of happiness that his spirit was continually lost in God” (124). In other words, to speak very bluntly, he often appeared to be crazy!

Now it’s important to be cautious when considering this whole subject of saints and sanctity and in reading a treatise in the genre of hagiography. As I’ve already noted, saints are to be regarded as role models. According to the Tradition, they help the Christian understand the full extent of salvation, and they provide in so doing, in their very lives and character and deeds, an invitation to a deepening of one’s own spiritual life. Perhaps most importantly they assist us in seeing that being “nice” is *not* everything, that there’s considerably more to this religion business than simply moral decency and

ethical behavior. On the other hand, to say that a saint is a role model doesn't mean that his or her life must be copied in all its particulars. No one is claiming you have to imitate Francis's behavior down to the most graphic details in order to count yourself sanctified—for which I at least breathe a sigh of relief! Must each and every one of us make a practice of kissing and embracing lepers, as Francis did? No. Must we all found religious orders or set about trying to convert a Muslim sultan, as Francis did? No again. Must we all cry our eyes out, or ruin our physical health with fasting, as Francis did? Once more the answer is no.

The Christian Tradition doesn't suppose, in other words, that sanctity depends upon some sort of cloning process in which all truly deified people begin looking and acting and talking alike. Saints are not like the marshmallow bunnies they sell in the stores at Easter, all of them identical in shape and taste and sealed away behind a cellophane wrapper. On the contrary, it's very clear from hagiographical literature that saints are if anything much more distinctive, even idiosyncratic, than the rest of us, and for this reason their actions and words are often puzzling and almost always surprising. One thinks in this context of what St Paul had to say on the whole subject of spiritual gifts. "There are diversities of gifts," he writes, "but the same [Holy] Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4). And then, comparing people to the organs of the body, Paul goes on to ask the rhetorical question, "If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?" (1 Cor. 12:17). We might ask in a similar vein: if the whole body were a Francis of Assisi, where would be the people who carried him around when he could no longer walk? (see 138). My point is simply that variety and complementarity, not monotony and repetition, are the true marks of the authentic spiritual life. In fact one very important criterion for distinguishing the religiously inauthentic or bogus is its insistence that everybody should be exactly the same. This is a common feature in cults of all kinds. So no (back to the point): the reason the Christian is encouraged to study the lives of the saints, Francis among them, is not in order to copy all the details. The aim is rather that one might extract from those details certain essential principles or keys, principles that do apply to all who are seeking perfection or sanctification.

Before we can possibly perform this “extraction”, however—before we can see any use in reading this genre—it’s necessary to take hagiography seriously. If someone thinks these accounts are all just make-believe—simply the weird sort of thing religious fanatics concoct—it’s going to be pretty hard for him to accept the suggestion that the saintly people described are worthy examples to follow. Obviously anyone who rejects the possibility of what Christ called “the greater works” of sanctification is going to think that any particular narrative, like the one you’ve read, is nothing but a dusty old legend. If sanctification this side of the grave is *in principle* impossible, then *in fact* the specific words and deeds that Bonaventure attributes to St Francis, often involving incredible miracles, must be impossible as well.

As I hope you can see, there are some huge issues here, the resolution of which would require going well beyond the limits of systematic theology and delving instead into philosophical theology, something I really can’t do in the context of this course. In lieu of a larger and more thorough discussion of these matters, however, it seemed to me that it might be useful to consider just one question that probably arises in everyone’s mind at some point when considering the phenomena of sanctity. The question is this: how are we to decide whether something is truly miraculous, an authentic manifestation of the Holy Spirit? We all know that people (ourselves included) sometimes think they see things that aren’t really there, to say nothing of the existence of charlatans and con artists, who deliberately try to deceive. How do we know whom to trust? Whether you’re talking about the life of St Francis or about some other alleged instance of spiritual gifts in our day, it’s important to ask what the criteria are for distinguishing between the authentic and the spurious. Here’s where the reading by C. S. Lewis comes in.

“Transposition” is a sermon he preached on Whit-Sunday, the traditional Anglican name for Pentecost, a day in the liturgical calendar when Christians commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit and the “birthday” of the Church in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:1-4). Since it was Pentecost, the theme of Lewis’s sermon was naturally bound up with the whole question of spiritual gifts, and the essential point he wants to make in his homily is that the action of the Spirit, whatever else we may think about it, is never against nature or in contradiction to it, but rather in accordance with nature, consistent with its ordinary and non-miraculous operations. Supernatural power is

able to produce effects in this world that would not have occurred, or at least would not have occurred the same way, had nature been left on its own. But at the same time a genuine miracle (says Lewis) will never do violence to the basic pattern of nature. As I hope you remember, this was also his fundamental argument in the last thing you read by him, “The Grand Miracle”. In discussing that chapter, I mentioned the Biblical story about Christ’s transformation of water into wine at Cana as an example of the principle Lewis had in mind. Water is always becoming wine, he said; Jesus just did it more quickly. The basis of Lewis’s position can be traced back to a traditional Christian axiom that St Thomas Aquinas gave classic expression to, back at the beginning of the semester, when he wrote that “grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it” (Reader, 14). We’ve since seen the Christological implications of this principle in the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. In Christ, the Divine is united with human nature, not by displacing or overwhelming it, but by exalting and completing it. So it is also, says Lewis, with the Holy Spirit in relationship to nature as a whole.

What this means, however, is that a genuine action of the Spirit can easily be misunderstood, or even not noticed, by those who are looking only at the resulting effects of that action in the physical or empirical world. This was why the bystanders on the first Pentecost supposed the disciples were simply drunk—“They are filled with new wine” (Acts 2:13)—and why the Pharisees could claim that Jesus was possessed by a devil. “It is only by Beelzebul,” they said, “the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons” (Matt. 12:24). According to Lewis, these mistakes can be explained at least in part by the fact that a higher reality is always so much richer and nuanced than a lower reality that it must sometimes express quite different truths and values through the same lower-level experiences.

His examples include the relationship between the emotions and the senses, and his preferred metaphor for describing this relationship is the musical metaphor of transposition. When a musician changes the key of a piece of music, he’s said to be transposing the piece, moving the pitch of a series of notes up or down. Not to quibble, but I think Lewis might have actually done better to speak of transcription, another musical term which is used to refer to the changes that are made when someone re-writes a piece of music originally intended for one group of instruments for another group, or

for one instrument alone. Having only ten fingers and only the sounds available on a piano keyboard, a pianist must sometimes use the same notes to convey in different passages the very different tonal quality of the flutes and the cellos and the French horns in an original orchestral score of the same song, and the result is a transcription. It's just the same, says Lewis, when it comes to our emotions. Because the "tonal" repertoire (as it were) of man's senses is less varied than that of his emotions, the same physical organ must often be used to communicate different, and even contrary, emotions, as we see for example in tears, which can express either joy or sadness. It's just the same in the relationship between acts of the Holy Spirit and their human effects or expression. Obviously the Spirit is a higher order reality, and for that reason (according to Lewis) we should not be surprised when we find that "the very same phenomenon which is sometimes not only natural but even pathological is at other times ... the organ of the Holy Ghost" (144).

Back to St Francis. If we're going to profit from reading about his life, I've said, we need to suspend any disbelief we might otherwise harbor and assume that the events described are at least possible. But wait just a minute! How can anyone really do that? a skeptic might ask. How can you take this stuff seriously? Isn't it clear that Bonaventure's biography is largely fantasy? Even supposing we could accept what he says as having some slender basis in the actual facts—and that he isn't playing fast and loose with the data—isn't it clear that the phenomena he reports must have had some natural, if not pathological, explanation?

Please understand. I'm asking these questions, not because all of you will necessarily have them—most people who take a course called "Christian Theology" have little difficulty accepting the possibility of miracles—but simply to illustrate what the typical skeptical response is going to be to this material. The skeptic is going to throw up his hands in frustration and declare that it's all just nonsense, with no glimmer of proof. And if Lewis is right, Christians must agree with the point about proof. They must admit that there's no way to answer the skeptic on the skeptic's own grounds. How could anyone prove, for example, that St Francis's tears were not in fact rooted in some sort of psychological trauma or in a physiological malady? You obviously can't. Or how could you prove that he really had power over fire and that it would cool at his command? A

determined cynic could probably even come up with some fancy way of discounting what we call the stigmata—the visible signs of crucifixion in St Francis’s flesh. Do you remember what I’m talking about? Francis is said to have borne in his hands and feet the wounds of Christ Himself, thus showing how completely he shared in Christ’s life. Bonaventure tells us that “the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet, the heads of which were in the palms of his hands and on the instep of each foot, while the points protruded on the opposite side” (135). As you may know, it’s been well documented that a Roman Catholic saint of the twentieth century, Padre Pio (1887-1968), showed the same signs, bleeding continually from his hands, feet, and side for fifty years, from 1918 until his death. But as I said, a determined cynic or skeptic will doubtless call into question even this dramatic phenomenon, supposing that if it has any basis in fact, it was simply the effect of some weird psychosomatic disorder. Given such objections, Lewis very astutely writes, “It is no good browbeating the critic who approaches a Transposition from below. On the evidence available to him”—that is, in the absence of any independent contact with the higher reality in question—“his conclusion is the only one possible” (150). The critic’s “deliberate refusal to understand things from above” (152) can’t be overcome by mere argument.

On the other hand, if we choose instead to approach this whole matter from the standpoint of traditional Christian theology—which is of course what we’re trying to do in this class, and which obviously does attempt to look at such things “from above”—there’s surely no reason to dismiss Bonaventure’s account. On the contrary, if one is prepared to believe (as Christians do) that the Holy Spirit is able to act in this world and in man, and if as Christ promised this action is intended to produce “greater works” than His own—in at least some of those so affected—then it makes perfect sense to treat St Bonaventure’s descriptions seriously, accepting them as accurate records of Francis’s actual life. And when one does so, when one studies this and other saints’ lives carefully and with an open-minded attitude, one comes away with the principles I was mentioning earlier. We’re able then to extract several keys to sanctity, keys that are to be considered and pondered if one wishes to grasp the fullest or highest meaning of salvation.

I would sum up those keys in this fashion. One sees in a man like St Francis that the effects of the Fall have been reversed. To be precise, wisdom has replaced ignorance

in his mind, governance or authority has replaced obsequiousness and slavery in his will, and temperance has replaced intemperance at the level of his emotions. Furthermore, as a result of these several reversals, the three parts of his soul have returned to their proper hierarchical order. The mind, which is now in touch with the Spirit, directs the will, and the will in turn has regained its proper authority over the emotions. When I say, by the way, that Francis's mind was in touch with the "spirit", I mean both his own spirit (the uppermost level of the human microcosm) and the Holy Spirit of God. The question has come up before as to the exact relationship between these two spirits. I've said that they're not exactly the same—the first is created, and the second is not—and yet in someone like Francis the bond or union between them is extremely intimate. Thomas Aquinas goes so far as to say that in the case of a saint the Holy Spirit *is* the spirit of man (*Summa Theologica* I, 38, 2). One remembers in this connection St Paul's assertion, in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me". (Of course, we have to be careful here so that we don't inadvertently succumb to the Apollinarian heresy; do you see why I say that?)

In any case, back to my point: in a man like St Francis of Assisi, we see evidence of a reversal of the effects of the Fall. Or rather, to be more precise—and more circumspect—perhaps I should say simply the *psychic* effects of the Fall. The transformation I'm focusing on can best be seen in his soul. When we look instead at his body, at the somatic dimension of his microcosm, it's clear that mortality—which, as I've emphasized before, is the most intractable of the infralapsarian marks on our fallen nature—*hasn't* yet been laid completely aside. Francis's body seems to have remained throughout his life in some way still subject to the forces of nature, and we know that, unlike Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), he did finally die. At the same time it's worth noting that his body was not as fully subject as ours to the conditions of physical existence: we're told, for example, that he could not only levitate but also bi-locate (128). If we were to look at a wider range of Christian saints, we would discover instances of an even more astonishing degree of bodily transformation—resulting, for example, in the phenomenon known as incorruption, such as one finds in the case of St John the Wonderworker (1896-1966), whose body has never decayed (even though it wasn't embalmed) and can be seen even today in its glass-topped casket in the Russian

Orthodox Cathedral of The Joy of All Who Sorrow in San Francisco. Incorruption aside, the Orthodox Tradition also ascribes the experience of transfiguration to many of its saints: while still alive on the earth, their physical bodies are said to have attained to the very high state of participating in the “uncreated Light” with which Christ Himself shown on Mount Tabor (Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:1-8; Luke 9:28-36). A classic case is that of St Seraphim of Sarov (1754-1833). I’ll tell you his story in class. Leaving such extraordinary states aside, however, and concentrating instead only on the state of the soul, we certainly see evidence of an almost total transformation in the life of St Francis. We find a certain “polarity” on each of the three psychic planes, a balance (in other words) of apparently opposite qualities, as in a magnet’s two poles.

Assuming that a picture’s worth a thousand words, I’ll show you a diagram of what I have in mind in class—a picture of the saintly soul.

## Lecture 18: Justifying Works

Today we turn to the last chapter of *The Orthodox Way*. There's also a short Epilogue I'll be discussing later, but Chapter 6 is the last chapter as such. And it's a chapter with a rather surprising title, or so it seemed to me when I first read the book. The other titles make immediate sense, at least to a Christian, but this one is different: "God as Prayer".

Perhaps *you* weren't surprised when you saw it, but if not it may be that you just didn't stop to consider the implications of that phrase. To speak of any *X as Y* is to say that in some sense *X is Y*. You may consider a person, for example, in her role as a mother, or as a daughter of her mother, or as a botanist or photographer (if that's her profession), or as an American (if that's her nationality), and so on. And you can do this insofar as that person is a mother, is a daughter, is a botanist or photographer, and is an American. But now notice what this says about God. To entitle a chapter "God *as* Prayer", as Ware has done, is to imply that in some sense God *is* prayer. God is not only a Mystery (Chapter 1), not only a Trinity (Chapter 2), not only a Creator (Chapter 3), not only Man in Jesus Christ (Chapter 4), and not only a Spirit (Chapter 5). In addition to all that, God is Himself also Prayer (Chapter 6). God, it seems, is not only the object of prayer, the One whom a Christians pray *to*. He's also in some way that prayer *itself*.

What this rather odd-sounding claim might mean was suggested by C. S. Lewis several readings ago, back when he was attempting to explain the doctrine of the Trinity in what he called "practical" terms. In the selection called "The Three-Personal God", Lewis said that any truly adequate understanding of God depends upon real experience, and not just abstract theologizing. "There isn't any good talking about Him. The thing that matters is being actually drawn into that three-personal life, and that may begin any time—tonight, if you like. What I mean is this," he continues: "An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get into touch with God. But if he is a Christian he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God—that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying—the

goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers” (59-60).

Ware takes this basic idea and develops it even further. When we hear the word *prayer*, most of us usually think first of words, words addressed by a religious person to God. If you’re a believer, you think of prayer as a dialogue, and if you’re an atheist, I suppose you’d say prayer is a monologue. But either way it’s words that tend to come to mind initially. According to Ware, however, prayer is much more than just the words one says. In fact it’s more than any action or deed one might perform or engage in—whether that activity is of a verbal or non-verbal kind. Although praying usually includes words, meditations, and contemplative methods of various sorts, these are all things that one *does*. They all involve actions, and if Ware is correct, prayer refers ultimately, not to an action or any set of actions, but to a state of being. It’s not something you do, but rather something you *are*—something you are to the extent that prayer leads you to an ever-deepening participation in the God-who-is-Prayer. Prayer in such a case is “no longer something that we think or say, but something that we are: for the ultimate purpose of the spiritual Way is not just a person who *says* prayers from time to time, but a person who *is* prayer all the time” (123). As I hope you can see, understood in this highest of senses, prayer is intimately linked to the sanctification or deification we’ve been talking about in the last several classes. Prayer is a name for the level of being a man finally attains when he has been filled, like Christ Himself, with “all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19).

In discussing Chapter 6, we’re going to be coming at the whole question of sanctification or human perfection from the opposite end, as it were. In Chapter 5 our primary task was to try to understand the process of salvation in relation to the Holy Spirit. I explained that in the Christian Tradition the Spirit builds upon Christ’s work of justification in order to bring human beings to the second and higher stage of sanctification. It’s the Spirit who assists man in reaching that full perfection in God which is disclosed by Christ Himself in the scriptures: “You are to be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Here’s our whole semester, in a sense, reduced to a single verse. For this is man’s final goal, the ultimate aim of human life, and

the rationale behind the whole Christian religion—as it is (I might add) behind every religion. Every religion exists for no other reason than to bring man to *perfection*.

But now please notice this. (Here comes the change of direction). The verse in question, Matthew 5:48, takes the form of an implied command. “You are *to be* perfect,” says Christ. There’s actually a slight discrepancy among the surviving Greek manuscripts. When we turn to this verse, we find that some contain the word *esesthe*, which is the future middle indicative form of the verb “to be”, so literally “you *shall be* perfect”, while others preserve the word *ginesthe*, which is the present, middle/passive (deponent) imperative of that same verb, so literally “*keep on becoming* perfect”. Either way, though, Christ is implicitly telling man that something *ought* be done, that man is to *do* it, and that it *will* thus come to pass. “You are to be perfect” is like “you ought to pass the salt” or “be sure to study hard for the final exam”. The state of perfection is something for which man is at least partly responsible, something in the seeking of which he must be actively engaged. We see this in Christ’s words to the rich young man: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matt. 19:21). When I tell you that you ought to pass the salt, I don’t assume that my words will themselves cause the saltshaker to move through the air. You need to respond, and it’s the same here. While deification or perfection is the result of the Holy Spirit’s supernatural *assistance*, this assistance is only part of the soteriological recipe.

Unless Christ is just pulling our leg in Matthew 5:48, God’s contribution to the process of salvation—whether through the Person of the Son or through the Person of the Spirit—doesn’t mean that man has nothing to contribute as well, that he’s off the hook, so to speak. On the contrary, it appears we human beings must actually do something, too—that we must in some fashion *work* for our full salvation. Here precisely is where Chapter 6 fits in. Where Chapter 5 in a sense was the theory, the theory of salvation by God, Chapter 6 is the practice, the practice of salvation by man. Or to use different words: where our discussions of Chapter 5 were devoted mainly to soteriological doctrine, Chapter 6 and the corresponding items I’ve assigned in the Reader for this unit are devoted mainly to soteriological method, a method summed up in the Tradition by the single word *prayer*. If the Holy Spirit is God’s contribution to sanctification, then prayer

is man's contribution, and thus understood it includes whatever man says, whatever man thinks, whatever man does, and whatever man finally *is* as he moves toward full participation in God. Prayer (you could say) is the Christian name for an entire pattern of living, and it's the purpose of Chapter 6 to describe this pattern, spelling out its prerequisites and presuppositions.

I've said that sanctification requires that we *do* something—that people must in some fashion *work* for their full salvation—and I used that word “work” fully realizing how mistaken, perhaps even dangerous, it may seem to some in my audience. “Hold on,” you may be thinking, “*other* religions are religions of ‘works’. They think God can be reached by human efforts, and that's exactly the difference between them and Christianity. For Christianity teaches that the God-Man has done all the work for us and that we need only *believe* to be saved. Works have nothing whatsoever to do with salvation. Cutsinger has crossed a line for sure now. Perhaps this is a class in theology, but it's certainly not *Christian* theology!” Well, I don't know how many of you are actually thinking all that, but I'd be very surprised if no one is. And even if you're not, you're probably aware nonetheless that this issue of “works” is one that has frequently divided Christians, especially since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Therefore, before going any further in a discussion of prayer *per se*, we need to pause and spend some time looking more closely at this potentially explosive issue. It will be impossible for you to take seriously what Ware says in this chapter, or what I'll add in these lectures, until and unless you first see the rationale behind the Tradition's understanding of this whole question of works.

We've looked several times this semester at doctrines that have historically divided the West from the East, and thus Roman Catholics and Protestants from Orthodox Christians, the most recent of these being how they understand the source and the extent of man's sin. When it comes to the value (or not) of human works in the process of salvation, however, we're dealing with an issue on which Catholics and Orthodox are in basic agreement, but one which typically divides both of these groups from Protestants.

Given the religious demographics of South Carolina—remember the maps I showed you the first day of class?—the majority of Christians who take this course are

usually Protestants or come from Protestant backgrounds. As a result many (if not most) of you have probably been taught that salvation is a matter of *sola fide*, “faith alone”. This was the battle cry of the Protestant Reformation, the Biblical rallying point of Martin Luther and John Calvin—the two most important reformers—in their repudiation of what they considered to be an abuse and perversion of Christianity among the Roman Catholics of their time. Salvation (the Reformers said) does *not* depend at all on acts of penance, or on fasting, or on performing vigils, or on the number of times one might repeat the Rosary, or on giving money to the Church, or on making pilgrimages to the shrines of saints, or on the absolution of a priest—or on anything else that we humans might do to make ourselves more worthy in the eyes of God. For in fact there’s really nothing we *can* do, nothing we can “do” to be saved. As Luther and Calvin saw it, this was the very essence of the Gospel, the “good news” in Christ. Man is helpless in the face of evil. He’s in total bondage to sin and the devil, totally depraved, and he can do absolutely nothing to escape from this slavery. But that’s alright, because in fact he doesn’t have to. He doesn’t have to accomplish any works or perform any deeds or follow any commandments or laws, for salvation is a purely unmerited gift of God’s grace. All we have to do is accept that gift by faith alone.

As I said, this understanding of salvation will be very familiar to many of you. As usual, however, precisely because this *is* such a commonplace way of looking at things here in the South, what I’m going to concentrate on in this lecture and in my class presentation is the other, less familiar side of the issue in order to provide you with something new to think about, a fresh perspective. As always, of course, you’re perfectly free to disagree and to side with whatever you think is the more compelling position. In taking a deliberately *un*-Protestant stance, my aim is simply to give you some insight into why other Christians—in fact the great majority of Christians through history—have stressed the importance of works for salvation.

Let’s be clear first of all exactly where the difference lies. In disagreements like this, considerable time can be wasted with people talking past each other and not really understanding each other’s basic assumptions and claims. Perhaps the first thing to understand is that no true Christian believes that man can save himself. Sometimes Protestant polemicists caricature the Catholic and Orthodox position by claiming that it

advocates a kind of “self-help” program—that man can perfect himself without reference to God. But this is quite false. Whatever abuses there may have been in the medieval Roman Church, including such things as the sale of indulgences—and the Orthodox, by the way, are just as critical of this and other such Catholic practices as were Luther and the other Reformers—they *were* abuses precisely, and not representative of fundamental Roman Catholic teaching. Catholics and Orthodox are in complete agreement with traditional Protestants that fallen man can do nothing without the help of God and that if it were not for Christ’s atoning work, salvation would be impossible. This is a Christian consensus that clearly cuts across the lines dividing these various groups.

Having said this, however, Catholic and Orthodox Christians are going to add something more. They’re going to say that given God’s help—given Christ’s saving work—man is now obliged to do something as well. With the Holy Spirit leading and guiding him, he’s obliged to act in such a way as to make a proper and productive use of the gift he’s been given and to begin working in cooperation with God for the sake of his salvation. Ware anticipated this point in the last chapter. In Chapter 5 he wrote: “Unless we co-operate with God’s grace—unless, through the exercise of our free will, we struggle to perform the commandments—it is likely that the Spirit’s presence within us will remain hidden and unconscious” (100). Now in Chapter 6 he returns more emphatically to the same basic idea: “We are to hold in balance two complementary truths: without God’s grace we *can* do nothing; but without our voluntary co-operation God *will* do nothing.... Our salvation results from the convergence of two factors, unequal in value yet both indispensable: Divine initiative and human response. What God does is incomparably the more important, but man’s participation is also required” (112). This is the fundamental premise upon which everything else in the chapter depends.

We have to be careful, though, that we don’t formulate this premise in such a way that it ends up sounding like a business arrangement or corporate transaction. To say there’s a “convergence” of factors and that man must “co-operate” with God is not to say that God’s plans or purposes could ever be frustrated or compromised by man’s failure to fulfill his side of the bargain. The relationship between the Divine and the human remains forever asymmetrical. C. S. Lewis calls attention to this point in the selection in the Reader on the subject of “Faith”. We must never forget, writes Lewis, that “every faculty

you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God” (184).

In any case, No: cooperation and convergence between man and God ought not to be construed—by any Christian—to imply a relation of equals. But having admitted this fact and having done what one can to guard against this mistake, it’s just as necessary (say Catholics and Orthodox) to guard against an over-reaction in the opposite direction. We’re clearly not equal to God, and we can’t save ourselves. Insofar as the Protestant point of view was intended historically as a protest against alleged claims to the contrary, it served as an important corrective. But in rejecting these errors, one must avoid going to the opposite extreme of suggesting that man has no contribution to make to salvation—that God does everything while man does nothing.

This, however, is precisely what Luther and Calvin, as well as many of their successors, did teach. In fact both of these influential Protestant figures went so far as to proclaim and promote a doctrine known as double predestination. Both of them believed that a man’s final destiny—whether he ends up being saved or damned—is *predetermined* by God without the man himself having any choice in the matter. For there’s really no such thing, they agreed, as freedom of the will. Before you die, in fact before you were ever born—in fact before this world ever came into existence—God in His wisdom had already decided where you would end up for all eternity, and His decision is eternally binding and compelling. There’s nothing you can possibly do to change it. Some of you He predestined for salvation in Heaven, and some of you—in fact, most of you—He predestined for damnation in Hell. Hence the term “double” in the phrase *double predestination*. In neither case does the destiny have anything whatsoever to do with your own personal merits or defects, or with the so-called choices you may have made in your life. It’s simply a matter of Divine decree, for reasons known only to God. As perhaps you can see, this way of looking at things dovetails well with the Western conception of original sin and total depravity, ideas which were very much in Luther and Calvin’s mind when they formulated their predestinarian views. If there’s nothing good in fallen man, no remaining spark of his supralapsarian nature, then clearly any hope of salvation must rest entirely with God, and just as clearly it will have nothing to do with any human merits. The Calvinist Synod of Dort (meeting in the Dutch city of

that name in 1618-19) underscored these connections in a well-known list of five essential doctrines, which (as it happens) can be remembered with the help of the acronym T.U.L.I.P. (I've had Presbyterian students—Presbyterians are among Calvin's theological progeny—tell me that they memorized these doctrines in Sunday School by cutting out paper tulips. Perhaps you did too.) Anyway, what the letters stand for is: **T**otal Depravity, **U**nconditional Election, **L**imited Atonement, **I**rrresistible Grace, and **P**reservation of the Saints. We've talked about total depravity before, and I'll explain the other terms in this list more fully in class.

This stress on T.U.L.I.P. is what I mean by an “over-reaction in the other direction”. As Catholics and Orthodox see it, it's all well and good to claim that man can't be saved without God. It's certainly true that he can't be. But it's completely false to conclude from this certitude that salvation is therefore irresistible and unmerited, and beyond man's control. From the Catholic and Orthodox point of view, there are at least five major problems with this characteristically Protestant viewpoint. I'd like to sketch them here, though let me say at once that an entire lecture could be given on each. All I can do here is skim the surface.

1. First of all, the predestinarian scenario is inconsistent with the basic approach or appeal of the scriptures, an appeal that clearly implies the importance of man's working with God. It's true that there are certain Biblical passages which, taken on their own, might lead one to think that salvation is solely God's work, and Luther and Calvin were definitely experts in quoting such Scriptural texts. A case in point is an often-cited passage in Romans where St Paul compares people to pots and God to a potter. “Has the potter no right over the clay,” Paul asks rhetorically, “to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?” (Rom. 9:21). Of course He does, you're supposed to answer, and if that's so—the logic goes—then surely God has a right to save some people while damning others, and in neither case do the people have any more right than a piece of clay to complain. Nevertheless (say the Catholics and Orthodox), when the Scriptures are taken as a whole, it's very hard for a predestinarian to explain their persistent appeal to man's power of decision. If in fact that power is nonexistent or moot, why does the Bible make it sound otherwise? Why for instance should man have been given the Ten Commandments and other laws if he couldn't obey them, or if his obeying

them made no difference? You might object, “Oh, but that was in Old Testament times, and the whole point of the old law was simply to show us our sinfulness.” But if that’s so, why would Christ Himself have spoken so frequently (as He does, for example, in Matthew 5:20-30) about rewards and punishments in the next life? And why would He have issued so many commandments Himself unless human choice and its resulting action really count for something? Even St Paul, even in the same book of Romans, can say, “I appeal to you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.... Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:1-2). It seems clear from these Biblical texts, as from numerous others, that Ware—echoing the fundamental conviction of his fellow Orthodox as well as Roman Catholics—is right: on the one hand salvation is the result of God’s will and God’s mercy, but on the other hand it also depends on man’s own efforts to conform himself to that will through moral behavior, ascetical struggle, and spiritual discipline.

2. A second problem is that the predestinarian standpoint fails to distinguish between the two major phases of salvation. In fact sanctification is basically forgotten about, and salvation as such is equated with justification. Justification, which refers of course to Christ’s work, is indeed something God alone is responsible for, and so it makes a certain amount of sense—if you collapse the two stages—to take the further step of insisting that salvation is a *fait accompli* and that the only thing man has to do is accept it. This was essentially what Luther did. He read in Romans 3:28, “A man is justified by faith apart from works of the law”, and thinking that justification was the whole story, he drew the conclusion that all works are irrelevant. And then, to bolster this bias, Luther did two further things. First, in translating this verse from Greek into German, he added the word “alone” even though there was no warrant for it in the original. St Paul had written that man is justified *pistei* (Greek for “by faith”), a formulation that clearly allows for other, complementary factors: faith is necessary, yes, but that doesn’t mean it’s sufficient. In Luther’s German translation of that verse, however, what we find is that man is justified *allein durch den Glauben*—literally, “only by the faith”, that is, by faith *alone*. The second thing Luther did was to rip the Epistle of James out of his copy of the New

Testament, declaring it to be an “epistle of straw” and contrary to the true Gospel of Christ. His reasons were simple: according to James 2:17, “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead”. This was obviously a claim that a predestinarian like Luther couldn’t possibly accept.

3. Thirdly, the doctrine of predestination often rests on a confusion of terms. To be precise, it confuses the idea of predestination with the prescience or foreknowledge of God. Every Christian believes that God knows everything, including things that from our human point of view in time have not yet occurred. Back near the start of the semester, we talked at some length about the fact that the Divine Mystery is *trans*-temporal—that God exists outside and above the whole “time-line”—a fact that proved relevant (among other things) to our discussion of creation *ex nihilo* as a perpetual action. In any case, no traditional Christian, whatever his convictions or background, will dispute the claim that God has foreknowledge and that He’s therefore able to see all things, both past and future, as though they were *now*. This, however, is very different from saying that God *predetermines* what happens. His knowing when you’ll get up tomorrow morning or what you’ll have for supper the third Wednesday of next January doesn’t necessarily *cause* it to happen, any more than my knowing what you’re doing at a given moment compels you to do it. This is subtle point, I realize, and I remind you that I’m just skimming the surface here. If you want to read a classic Christian source on this point, take a look at Book V of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. In the meantime, I would only add that it’s because of this confusion of terms that Luther and Calvin seem once again—from the Catholic and Orthodox standpoint—not to have fully grasped what’s being said in the Bible. Like other predestinarians, they were fond of quoting Romans 8:29: “Those whom [God] foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.” The word *predestined* is in the text to be sure, but St Paul doesn’t use it to mean the same thing as *foreknew*, nor does he say that it comes first in the sequence. It’s rather the other way round. First God foreknows what a person will do, and then on that basis, having considered all the decisions the person will make in his life, God makes appropriate provision for that person’s destiny. It’s interesting, too, that this passage, seemingly so favorable to the predestinarian standpoint, follows immediately after a verse where Ware’s idea of cooperation is central. In Romans 8:28, Paul has just finished saying, “We

know that in everything God *works* for good *with* those [that is, in cooperation with those] who love Him”. “Works with” in the Greek is a single word: *synergei*, whence our word “synergy, a word Orthodox Christians like to stress in discussing man’s overall relation with God.

4. Yet a fourth difficulty with the doctrine of predestination is that it’s directly opposed to the Christological teaching of Chalcedon. As I’ve been trying to help you see in recent lectures, the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils and their ways of formulating the relationship between the two natures of Christ have important implications for how we view the relationship between man and God in general. If the Definition promulgated by the Council of Chalcedon is right—if, in other words, the Divine and the human do not compete with each other, human nature not being overwhelmed or extinguished but rather enhanced and perfected through its union with God—then there’s every reason to doubt whether the Lutheran and Calvinist picture is adequate. For what that picture assumes is the very same thing assumed in the Apollinarian and monophysite heresies, heresies based on the erroneous claim that God and man cannot co-exist in the same place at the same time without there being either a compromise of the Divine or a suppression of the human. Because of their fear that our choices might in some way conflict with God’s sovereign purposes, undermining His dignity and authority—and taking away the “right” of the “Potter”—predestinarians are obliged to deny that we have a free will at all. But in so doing, to repeat my point, they have failed to understand the soteriological emphases and implications of traditional Christology.

5. Finally, there’s a fifth problem. It’s actually rather closely related to the Christological issue, but it has a somewhat more philosophical or metaphysical twist. It’s a problem having to do with how one understands the meaning of infinite. Luther and Calvin, and other theologians like them, tend to consider God’s infinity in terms of sheer power. Every Christian would say (of course) that God is infinite, that He exists beyond all restrictions and limits—that He’s “that than which nothing greater can be thought”, to recall again Anselm’s definition. But when predestinarians ponder this fact, they usually end up equating this Divine “beyond-ness” and “greatness” with authority and sovereignty, and hence with the sort of monarchical rights that come from having strength on one’s side. God in short is the Supreme Force in the universe. He has, you

might say, 100% of all the available power, which of course means that the sum total of everybody else's power is 0. I'm not saying that a Calvin or Luther would necessarily put things this way, but in point of fact the predestinarian conception of God does tend to have a rather "quantitative" undertone. The problem, however, is that this way of envisioning God's relation to the universe fails to grasp the fact, the metaphysical fact, that infinity refers to God's very mode or dimension of being, and not merely to the power that He's able to exercise. When we say that the Divine Reality is infinite, what we mean (or should mean) is that It's beyond all competition and disjunction, and therefore—this is extremely important—that It needn't exclude other realities, or compete with them for position or rank, in order to be Itself. To be in-finite is to have neither boundaries nor edges, and That which has no boundaries doesn't resist things that do—things like free human beings, for example. Rather It permeates them with Its own Reality, and in so doing It honors, sustains, and enhances them without any threat to Its own supremacy. Or so at least a traditional Catholic or Orthodox theologian would wish to argue.

Can you see why?

## Lecture 19: Presuppositions of Prayer

Last time we started to discuss the concluding chapter of our book, a chapter entitled “God as Prayer”. I began my lecture by calling your attention to the rather surprising implications of this title. If you can talk about God *as* prayer, then in some sense God must *be* prayer, and this led to my saying that prayer must therefore be something more than just words. In the final analysis, prayer is a state of being in which man comes to share in the very nature of God. Prayer is thus very closely related to what we’ve been saying about the second and higher stage of salvation. It’s a name for everything man does to come more closely into relation with God. Prayer, in other words, is the human contribution to sanctification, the human side of that process—all the things a person can and should do to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in attaining perfection. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” says St Paul, “for God is at work within you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13). The second of these two verses tells us that salvation depends upon the inward presence of God, which of course is supplied by the Holy Spirit, precisely. The first verse, however, makes it clear that this Divine presence is not sufficient. Man must do something as well: he must *work together*—here’s that idea of “synergy” again—with the Spirit if he hopes to be completely saved. And so, says Ware, “Our salvation results from the convergence of two factors, unequal in value yet both indispensable: Divine initiative and human response” (112).

We then turned to an extended discussion of the whole subject of works. I pointed out that since the Reformation the issue of works has been one of the major causes of division between Christians, specifically between Orthodox and Catholics, on the one hand, who together teach that works are a necessary complement to faith, and Protestants, on the other hand, many of whom follow the lead of Luther and Calvin in teaching that salvation comes by faith alone. I also explained that historically the logic of the Protestant viewpoint has led to the adoption among certain Christian groups of a doctrine of double predestination. If man can do nothing to merit salvation, if his contribution to the process is zero, then it automatically follows, as it did for Luther and Calvin, that our

final destiny is the result of Divine determination. God simply decrees, without regard to a person's actions or life, whether he will be saved or damned. The rest of the lecture was devoted to explaining why Catholics and Orthodox reject this predestinarian point of view, and I mentioned five reasons. In supposing that God does everything and man does nothing, the Reformers and their followers, first, neglected the Bible's overall appeal to personal decision and action; second, failed to distinguish justification, which *is* entirely the work of God, from sanctification, which depends on man's choice; third, confused predestination with foreknowledge, falsely assuming that because God *knows* the future He must therefore *make* it happen; fourth, failed to consider the implications of Chalcedon and the traditional doctrine of the two natures of Christ for understanding the relationship between God and man; and fifth, misunderstood the meaning of "infinite", using it to describe only God's power but not His mode of being.

On the assumption (as always) that a picture is worth a thousand words, I've put together some diagrams that compare various Christian views on this subject. They're an attempt to picture conflicting understandings as to how man comes to be saved. The first (as you'll see in class) is a representation of Pelagianism. This is a term derived—like many theological “-isms”—from the name of an early proponent of the position, in this case a man named Pelagius, a contemporary of St Augustine, who lived in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Pelagius is said to have taught that man can take the initial and fundamental steps toward salvation by his own efforts alone, apart from the work of either Christ or the Spirit. It's unclear exactly how far Pelagius himself thought man could go, but historically the heresy named for him has often been accused of suggesting that man can make the whole journey back to God on his own. It was to this claim that the Protestant Reformers were in part reacting when they countered with their radically opposite view, predestinarianism, which teaches on the contrary that it's God who makes “the whole journey”, coming to man and doing for man what he has no hope of doing on his own. There's also a kind of compromise position, which theologians refer to as semi-Pelagianism. This can take two forms. One form teaches that God initiates the process of salvation by coming halfway to man, but with man being responsible for going the remaining distance himself. This point of view is sometimes called Arminianism, after the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). A second form reverses the order,

suggesting that man must first show initiative in reaching out to God, who then condescends to come to man. Either way God's contribution is to reduce the distance man must travel, but man must still travel that distance—still *work* for salvation.

I don't know whether you were at all persuaded by my arguments last time that human work is an essential part of being saved. If not, that's fine. But in that case, I must ask that you nonetheless try to accept this idea on an experimental basis—for the sake of the argument, as we say—because in order to continue my exposition of Chapter 6 and related ideas, I'm going to have to assume that the majority of Christians throughout history have been right on this issue, which means that the Roman Catholic and Orthodox position is correct and that the early Reformers were mistaken in their insistence on “faith alone”. Prayer, as Ware is using the term and as I noted in Lecture 18, refers to the human side of salvation. Everything he says on this subject presupposes that we're free to accept or reject the gospel, that we must make an effort to assimilate or appropriate the saving energies of God, and that we're therefore in some sense responsible for “working out” our own ultimate destiny.

Besides the importance of human work, however, prayer presupposes several other things, too. Ware calls our attention to three of these “presuppositions” or prerequisites, three “indispensable elements” (107) of the spiritual Way: the first is *ecclesial*, the second *sacramental*, and the third *evangelical*. The life of prayer depends, in other words, on membership in the Church, participation in the sacraments, and reliance on the Bible. These are the channels, if you will, through which or along which the Holy Spirit operates. They're the means God Himself has provided for the continual transmission of His saving power to man, and it's through them that a Christian is able to receive the Divine and deifying energies, which his will can then actualize in the cooperative process of salvation. I'd like to spend the rest of my time in this lecture clarifying some of the points Ware makes and adding a few comments of my own concerning these three presuppositions.

I'll begin with the presupposition of Scripture—taking it out of the order in which it appears in the book—because on this subject we can be very brief. At the beginning of the semester we spent considerable time underscoring the role and the importance of the Bible in traditional Christian theology (notably in Lecture 2). I explained at the time that

Christianity is based on special or supernatural Revelation and that the primary form of this Revelation is the Person of Jesus Christ. I took special pains in stressing this point so as to counter the common error of supposing that the Bible is the Christian's principal connection with God. The Bible, I said, should be regarded instead as a part of Tradition, which is the radiation through time of the impact of Revelation in space. The Scriptures are the most important of the written parts of that Tradition, but they're meant to work in concert with other parts, both written and otherwise, in recalling Christians backward to Christ and in projecting the impetus of His life forward through history. Since then you've seen several examples of how the development and explication of the Christian faith depend on traditional teachings of an extra-Biblical kind. The doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and the doctrine of Christ as "true God and true man" all go beyond what can be found explicitly or literally stated in the Scriptures.

Here in Chapter 6, Ware for the first time tells us specifically what his own Orthodox views are on this subject. He makes several important points, but I wanted to highlight just two of them. First, the Bible is to be understood as "the only pure and all-sufficient source of the doctrines of the faith" (110). These words are actually a veiled critique of Catholicism. I can't go into all the issues right now, but from the Orthodox point of view the Catholic Church has historically made the mistake of promoting certain dogmas that lack any obvious scriptural warrant. Examples of such teachings would include the Roman doctrines of purgatory and papal infallibility. As the Orthodox see it, the Christian should never be required to put his faith in a teaching that can't be clearly supported by the Scriptures. On the other hand—and this is the second of Ware's points I need to emphasize—the Christian must at the same time realize that the Bible's meaning is not always obvious and explicit, that it needs to be interpreted, and that the best interpretation will be the one which reflects, not just any given individual's personal opinions and preferences, but the consensus of the ages. In this case Ware's remarks amount to a criticism of the Protestant approach to the Scriptures, where it's often assumed that the meaning of the Bible can be discerned by anyone who approaches it faithfully. Countering this claim, Ware writes, "We [Orthodox] do not read the Bible as isolated individuals, interpreting it solely by the light of our private understanding.... We read it as members of the Church, in communion with all the other members throughout

the ages. The final criterion for our interpretation of Scripture is the *mind of the Church*. And this means keeping constantly in view how the meaning of Scripture is explained and applied in Holy Tradition: that is to say, how the Bible is understood by the Fathers and saints, and how it is used in liturgical worship” (110). This of course has been my own approach in this class. We’ve frequently quoted the Scriptures, but always within the interpretive context supplied by the Christian theological Tradition in general.

This brings us rather nicely to the second of the presuppositions, the “ecclesial” element. If the Scriptures are the proper foundation for the life of prayer, and if they can be correctly understood only in light of the wider Tradition and by reference to “the mind of the Church” as a whole, then clearly some relationship with that Church is essential for authentic Christian faith and practice. This is what Ware has in mind when he says that “the traveler on the Way” must be a “*member of the Church*. The journey,” he continues, “is undertaken in fellowship with others, not in isolation” (107).

Catholics and Protestants, as well as Orthodox, are obviously going to agree in some way with this claim. Everyone agrees, in other words, that you can’t be a Christian unless you belong to a church. One of the critical Biblical texts in support of this point comes in St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians where the Church is compared to human anatomy and described (we’ve noted this before) as the “body of Christ”. Paul writes, “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.... The body does not consist of one member but of many.... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:12-14, 27). All Christians, I repeat, recognize the importance of belonging to this body. As St Cyprian (d. 258) said, “A man cannot have God as his Father if he does not have the Church as his mother” (*On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, 6). But here’s where agreement ends, for what exactly “the body” is and what belonging to it involves have been a cause of dispute for centuries. Some of you may be planning on attending a seminary or divinity school. As you’ll discover if you do, entire courses are often taught on this topic. It’s called ecclesiology, and it’s the branch of theology that attempts to sort through all the questions and debates pertaining to the nature and structure of the true Christian Church. Needless to say, we

don't have a whole semester, and my remarks must therefore be even more superficial than usual.

Christian views of the Church have ranged historically along a spectrum between two opposite positions. At one end of this spectrum is the idea that the Church is *an invisible society spiritually linked to the risen Christ*. Many Protestants have historically adopted this standpoint, in large part because the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, against which the Reformation was a protest precisely, were perceived to have been linked to its institutional structure. As many Protestants see it, when the Church is defined in terms of its visibility and worldly influence, it can't help but become hopelessly compromised. All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely (to quote Lord Acton). It's therefore no accident—or so the argument runs—that the medieval Church, monarchically organized and very wealthy, should have become diseased. In any case, whatever the historical reasons, Protestant Christians, rather than looking to visible forms or authorities or institutional structures, typically prefer to think of the Church as an invisible brotherhood of like-minded believers, into which one enters simply through a free profession of faith in the lordship of Christ. The classic Biblical text for this point of view is Matthew 18:20. Christ says, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” In this perspective, the risen Christ is stressed, a Christ who makes Himself directly present to all believers through the power of the Holy Spirit, and there's therefore no need for priests and institutions and other intermediaries between the individual Christian and his Savior.

Then there's a second position, represented by those who say that the Church is *a visible institution historically linked to the incarnate Christ*. This is a way of looking at things shared by Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Anglicans (or Episcopalians). As for historical linkage, what they all have in mind is apostolic succession. The idea is that the source or foundation of the Church goes back to the moment when the incarnate Christ, nearing the end of His earthly ministry, bequeathed to His apostles the Holy Spirit (John 20:22), who then descended upon them in full measure on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). By virtue of these mighty acts, Christ and the Spirit gave those apostles authority over the rest of the faithful, an authority they transmitted before their deaths to their successors. These successors, the “overseers” or bishops, in turn passed along this authority to *their*

successors, and so on down until today. Therefore, say those who adopt the second ecclesiology, in order to be a member of the true body of Christ, it's necessary to be a member of a local parish or church community whose priest was duly ordained by a bishop, who was himself duly consecrated to that office by other bishops, who in turn were duly consecrated by others before them, all the way back to one or more of the first apostles, who had been special chosen and equipped for this office by Jesus Christ.

As you may know, there are heated disagreements among these apostolic churches themselves over the proper lines of transmission and over the question of who, if anyone, has ultimate authority over the rest of the church. The disagreement with the most important and far-reaching implications is between Roman Catholics on one side and the Orthodox on the other. Catholics maintain that the prime authority was given by Christ to St Peter, and hence that Peter's successors, the bishops of Rome or the "popes", have the right to a *universal jurisdiction* over all Christians. This Catholic claim is based on Matthew 16:18-19: "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Orthodoxy maintains, on the contrary, that Christ's authority was distributed equally to all his disciples, each of whom established a valid line of succession down to the present day. As a result, the Orthodox model of the Church is more collegial, conciliar, and communitarian, while the Roman conception is more centralized and monarchical.

As I admitted earlier, there's simply no way we can go into all this in detail. Arguments as to who's right and who's wrong are very complicated. In my own opinion, the truth of ecclesiology almost certainly lies between two extremes. At one extreme are those who would claim that the church is a purely subjective affair and that when two or more people find they believe the same things about Christ, *voila!* a church is born, a church just as valid as any other Christian body. This seems to me a much too individualistic and arbitrary point of view, and I personally can't believe that this was all Christ had in mind, or that He would have been happy about the fact that there are between 20,000 and 40,000 different groups (depending on your source) in the world today claiming to be "the" church. At the other extreme are those who insist that the

Church must be identified absolutely or monolithically with a single institution and that Christians of all other bodies are therefore going to hell. A classic example of this second point of view can be found in a famous papal bull called *Unam Sanctam*, issued by Pope Boniface VIII in 1302, where it was declared that *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*: that is, “outside the Church there is no salvation”. The Church that Boniface had in mind was, not surprisingly, the Roman Church. The document went on to state quite explicitly and unambiguously, “It is necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” The Catholic Church has since officially stepped away from this extreme formulation; the position of Catholics after Vatican II (1962-65) has been that while their church alone is the fullest expression of Christ’s “body”, there’s nonetheless saving grace in other Christian bodies as well. (Here’s an amusing, or rather bracing, note: according to the poet Dante, himself a Catholic, Pope Boniface ended up in hell. In Dante’s journey through the *Inferno*, he comes upon this particular bishop of Rome [Canto XIX.53] placed upside down in one of the numerous compartments of the fiery pit—in cosmic compensation, it seems, for this Pope’s exclusivist audacity!)

I myself make no claims as to who’s right on this subject. As I’ve already mentioned, it seems to me the truth is probably somewhere in the middle, and I think Ware strikes the right balance. He tells us that membership in the Church is one of the prerequisites for the life of prayer, and of course he’s speaking as an Orthodox bishop, which means he’s thinking primarily of the Orthodox Church. And yet he’s careful to insist that Orthodoxy has no monopoly on salvation. This comes through in at least two places in his books. First of all, in what you’ve read in this chapter, he acknowledges that those who reject Christ and the Church are by no means necessarily lost. “God is able to save those who in this life never belonged to His Church” (108). Elsewhere, in another of his books, *The Orthodox Church*, he points out that the opposite is also true: being a member of the Church in some visible sense is itself no guarantee of salvation. He quotes St Augustine in this regard: “How many sheep there are without, how many wolves within!” (*Homilies on John*, XIV, 12). Ware also explains in this other book that, while Orthodox Christians rightly “claim to know where the Church is”, they “cannot claim to know where it is not” (316). This seems to me a nicely balanced position.

I don't want to give the wrong impression here. Ware isn't about to suggest that "all churches are created equal" or that all of them are equally preferable. He's clearly convinced that the fullest or most complete manifestation of the body of Christ in this world can be found only where the sacraments are understood to be central, and this of course brings us to the third of his presuppositions of prayer. "The spiritual Way," he writes, "presupposes not only life in the Church but *life in the sacraments*. As Nicolas Cabasilas [b. c. 1322] affirms with great emphasis, it is the sacraments that constitute our life in Christ" (108). The sacraments, in other words, are an essential element in the process of sanctification, and receiving these sacraments is therefore an essential part of man's "contribution" to the saving process. As you may remember, I anticipated this point in our opening class when I defined the word *Christian* in terms of two basic doctrines and two basic practices. All traditional Christians, I said, believe in two things: the Trinity and the Incarnation; and they all practice two things: Baptism and Holy Communion. Both of these practices are *sacramental* in character—though I hasten to add that not every Christian refers to them as "sacraments". Call them what you will, every Christian (Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox) is going to agree, first of all, that in order to *become* a Christian a person must be baptized—not just in any fashion, but with water and in the Name of the Trinity—a practice based upon Christ's "great commission", which we find recorded at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Second, every Christian is going to agree that in order to *remain* a Christian a person must periodically receive Holy Communion, eating bread and drinking wine that have been blessed or consecrated by the words used by Christ at His "Last Supper" with the disciples. St Paul records these words in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, and in some form or other they're used in every traditional Christian church during the celebration of the sacred rite of Communion. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered ["traditioned", if you recall that discussion] to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'."

Like the words *go therefore and baptize*, the words *do this* are a direct command, and all Christians agree that living in obedience to these Dominical imperatives is an essential, non-negotiable part of the Christian faith.

But how Christians interpret these words and how they understand the significance of the resulting rites is by no means the same in all churches. Not everyone, in fact, even uses the word *sacrament*, and that's because the term tends to imply a particular understanding of what's "going on" in Baptism and Communion, not to mention such distinctively Orthodox rites as Chrismation and Confession—an understanding not every Christian is prepared to agree with. Christians can be divided on this point into two major groups, one of which we could simply call "sacramentalists", and the other "non-sacramentalists". Interestingly enough, this is a distinction that cuts across Christian groups in a different fashion from other divisions we've looked at. As we've seen this semester, some issues divide Catholics from Orthodox, while others divide Catholics and Orthodox from Protestants. In this case, however, we're talking about an aspect of Christianity that unites Catholics *and* Orthodox *and* some Protestants, too, but which divides them all from certain other Protestant bodies.

According to the sacramental view, the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of Communion—to speak only of these two rites—are objective expressions of Divine saving power. Whether one can see it or feel it or know it (or not), these elements have become truly imbued with the uncreated and saving energies of God. Hence the word "sacrament", which refers to something that is sacred or holy. The *non-sacramental* perspective would say by contrast that one is to perform baptisms and observe the rite of communion simply and solely because in doing so one fulfills the commands or ordinances of God. There's nothing special about the water or bread or wine that's involved. These elements may have a certain symbolic interest, of course, but they remain merely physical things without any intrinsic power, and they're in no essential way different from other physical things. Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Methodists who follow the teaching of Wesley are among those which hold the sacramentalist view, whereas Calvinists, Evangelicals, Baptists, and "non-denominational" Christians typically take a non-sacramentalist position.

That's more than enough for now, but in class I'll delve a bit more deeply into Ware's sacramental "presupposition" by focusing on the rite of Holy Communion and discussing with you a number of different Christian conceptions as to what the "bread" and the "wine" *really are*.

## Lecture 20:

### Invocation and the Spiritual Journey

Today I conclude my reflections on Ware's chapter about Prayer. Remember that "prayer" in this context is meant to refer to more than just pious words. It's the name we've been giving to whatever man does in cooperation with God. It's the "human side" of salvation, the means by which man ascends to God—climbing the ladder, as it were, that God has let down to him (cf. Gen. 28:10-19). In my last lecture I focused on the presuppositions of prayer. There were three of these, three "indispensable elements", as Ware calls them, which provide the Christian with a foundation for his movement Godward: namely, reliance on scripture, membership in the Church, and participation in the sacraments. We passed over the first rather quickly, simply reminding ourselves of the place of the Bible in the wider Christian Tradition. And then we looked in some detail at the different ways in which Christians have understood the Church and the sacraments.

A distinction was made between those Christians (mostly Protestant) who see the Church as an invisible society spiritually linked to the risen Christ by the faith of believers, and those who see it instead as a visible institution historically linked to the incarnate Christ by means of apostolic succession. The latter is the way Catholics, Orthodox, and Anglicans view the matter. Then we drew a second distinction between sacramentalist and non-sacramentalist Christians. When it comes to such rites as Baptism and Communion, the first group believes that the material elements involved in these practices (water, wine, and bread) come to contain the very power or energy of God Himself, whereas the second group believes that there's nothing especially sacred or "sacramental" about the elements themselves. One performs the rites simply and solely out of obedience to the commandments of Christ. In class I talked about different views of Communion, ranging from the literalistic perspective of Capernaism, which identifies the bread and wine with the actual body and blood of Jesus; to the merely symbolic or Zwinglian viewpoint, which understands communion to be no more than a reminder of Jesus; and then to the middle (and majority) position of those, including Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Lutherans, who believe in the "real presence" of Christ in Communion and who say that the bread and wine *are* today what Jesus's body and blood

were those many centuries ago in Palestine, namely, a veritable embodiment of the eternal Son of God.

In this lecture I'd like to change direction and say a few things—believe it or not!—about prayer itself. As no doubt you've noticed, we've been talking around the subject so far and have said very little about the largest part of Ware's chapter. Like the author of the selection in the Reader from *The Way of a Pilgrim*, you may have begun to think I'm among those who “sermonize about the qualities [and in our case the ‘presuppositions’] of prayer, rather than about the nature of the thing itself” (157). Our first session on the topic, two classes ago, was devoted to an extended defense of what amounted to only one short paragraph toward the beginning of the present chapter in *The Orthodox Way*, in which Ware states that salvation is a matter of “convergence” and “cooperation” between man and God. And then the last class was given over entirely to the presuppositions—to what must be in place before one can effectively begin to “work out [his] salvation” (Phil. 2:12).

There's a good reason for the approach I've been following. This is a course in systematic theology, where our principal concern is with doctrines and the Christian map of Reality. Our focus is basic Christian beliefs, and not (or at least not so much) the practices or spiritual methods of this religion. It therefore made sense to me to use what Ware has said about prayer as an occasion for discussing the relationship between faith and works as well as the subjects of ecclesiology and sacramental theology. If this were a course in mystical and ascetical theology, our focus would instead be on the practical details of the Christian spiritual journey. For in that case our main concern would be the *verification*, not the *exposition*, of doctrine—review the beginning of Lecture 1 if you don't remember this distinction—and we'd be trying to determine whether in fact the practice of prayer might help to corroborate the truth of the Christian worldview. Here, though—in the context of this course—our goal has been considerably more modest: simply to explain what traditional Christians say about The Way Things Really Are. Whether they're right or not, and how one might prove things either way, is too large a subject for now.

At the same time, though, I can't in good conscience simply move on to Ware's Epilogue without spending at least one class on the actual practice of Christian prayer.

This is a huge topic, of course, and we can only scratch the surface. Prayer is a whole pattern of life, a pattern that includes a regimen or discipline for every part of the self. More than just words, it's the activity of the entire human being as he seeks to move into the highest form of relation with God. Any truly adequate treatment of the topic would need to explain how traditional Christian practices are meant to work both individually and in concert in transforming our nature. Ware touches upon a number of different aspects of this pattern of living—although he himself is also merely summarizing. He mentions fasting, to pick just one practice, calling attention to the various ways in which this and other ascetical disciplines are meant to affect, not just the body, but the quality of one's emotions, this in turn having a profound effect on the rest of the soul and one's perceptions in general.

But for now, rather than trying to cover all of Ware's ground, I thought it best to concentrate my remarks on just a couple of points: first, the principal stages of the spiritual Path as they're understood by traditional Christians; and second, the practice of a particular form of prayer, namely "invocatory" or "monologic" prayer. (If you're interested in a more extended presentation of my views on these subjects, I recommend you have a look at two of my books: *Advice to the Serious Seeker*, the concluding part of which is devoted to the topic of prayer, and *Not of This World*, a collection of traditional Christian writings on the stages of the spiritual life; see [www.cutsinger.net](http://www.cutsinger.net) and click on "Publications".)

Ware divides the spiritual journey or path into three distinct stages or phases. First comes purification (*purgatio* in Latin, and *praktiki* in Greek); then illumination (*illuminatio, physiki*); and finally union (*unio, theologia*). These stages are also referred to sometimes by the Greek terms *catharsis, photisis, and theosis*. The word "stages" is actually a little misleading, because it makes it sound as though the three parts are strictly successive or sequential, whereas in fact, in the life of any given person, they're all combined in some way, rather like the three dimensions of space. In his movement toward God the spiritual traveler never leaves behind the places he's been; on the contrary, they persist as continuing supports for a further ascent to new levels of Divine relationship.

The first two stages or dimensions—purification and illumination—correspond respectively to the transcendent and the immanent dimensions of God, the “two poles” in man’s experience of God (Ware, Chapter 1). It’s precisely because the Divine Mystery is *beyond* the world and utterly different from anything man has ever experienced or conceived that he must purify himself from all attachment to that world if he wishes to be united with God. “Be not conformed to this world,” says St Paul, “but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). On the other hand—here’s the old paradox once again—it’s because this same Mystery is at the same time fully present *in* the world that the purified mind may come to discern God in what Ware calls the “thusness” or “thisness” of created things (119). Here, too, we may quote from Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he tells us that “the invisible things of [God] are clearly seen in the things He has made” (Rom. 1:20). Putting these two verses together what we discover is that the soul, once it’s freed from its attachment to the surface of things, is able to appreciate those things for their own intrinsic qualities. In this way *purgatio*, or purification, makes *illuminatio*, or illumination, possible. And it’s only at this point, precisely when both of these supports are in place, working together in a man’s spiritual practice, that *unio*, or union, can become a reality, for then one is able to pass “through” the things of this world “into” the depths of the Divine Reality itself, this being the ultimate goal of the spiritual life.

Now I realize all this talk about dimensions can seem rather vague. It’s natural for a person to ask what the stages of prayer might mean in more concrete terms. One way of answering that question is to connect each of the three steps of the Christian way to a specific spiritual state, one that serves (you might say) as the measure, criterion, or “litmus test” of having successfully reached the corresponding stage of the journey. These three states are each given a Greek name in Chapter 6: *apatheia* (117), *nepsis* (114), and *hesychia* (122). If you wish to know more precisely what purification entails—what exactly you ought to be looking for in yourself in order to know whether you’ve really reached the first milestone on the path back to God—then *apatheia* is your answer. Someone who is no longer “conformed to this world” will have come to enjoy and exhibit a state of complete “dispassion” (see Ware, 117). If you want to know, second, what we mean by the stage of illumination and whether you’ve gotten as far as that in

your journey, you would be well advised to ponder the meaning and implications of *nepsis*: that is, “watchfulness”, “wakefulness”, and “sobriety” (114). To be illumined or enlightened is to be awake to the inner essences of the creatures around us. And finally, if you’re looking to have at least a dim glimpse as to what the very highest of these three stages involves—the stage of *theologia* or *theosis*, in which man is granted complete union with God—then you should give attention to the meaning of *hesychia*, which is “stillness”, “silence”, and inner tranquility (122). To be fully united with God is to be in a permanent state of pure and thus motionless consciousness.

Let me expand just a little on the first two of these states, leaving a discussion of the third for other settings. My remarks must be brief and rather sketchy, but I want you to understand and appreciate how exalted these spiritual levels really are. Even the most elementary step toward a truly saving transformation, toward deification or self-realization in God, is well beyond the point where most of us currently are in our own personal journeys, and a clear recognition of that fact can be at once humbling and exhilarating, a prod or provocation toward deeper prayer.

*Apatheia*, we’ve said, can be translated as “dispassion”, but “detachment” is also an acceptable English equivalent. Either way the word is meant to refer to the habitual (and not merely passing) state of someone who’s no longer subject to those passions or “untempered emotions” which typify fallen man, who’s no longer controlled by the distractions of physical or even mental desire, and who’s therefore permanently beyond the reach of seduction and irritation. The Eastern fathers give considerable attention to precisely what this spiritual condition involves, breaking down what we might call the process of temptation into four basic parts, which they call suggestion, disturbance, coupling, and assent. The truly “apathetic” person, they teach, is the one who is so fully in control of his emotions and thoughts that he’s able, upon an instant’s notice—at the first inner glimmer of a provocation toward sin—to drive a very deliberate wedge of self-mastery between himself and the occasion for stumbling (the “suggestion”) before any mental disturbance, let alone any sinful outward act, can arise. I’ll describe this in more detail in class, but for the moment please note that the word “apathetic” has a very different meaning in this context from that of ordinary conversation. *Apatheia* and “apathy”, its literal English equivalent, do not here mean boredom, or dullness of spirit,

or cold-heartedness. The spiritually apathetic person, on the contrary, is full of love, and he or she may be keenly interested in many things. Such a person feels all of the emotions that you and I do, but without allowing them to gain control over the soul. To be “apathetic” in this technical sense is to be master of one’s passions, not the other way round.

Having begun to acquire at least some passing experience of *apatheia*, if not its permanent state, the spiritual traveler who’s fully engaged in true prayer will also seek to be watchful or wakeful. *Nepsis*, the second of the Greek terms Ware uses, is the traditional name for this further dimension of prayer. Where spiritual “apathy” or dispassion is linked mainly with man’s emotions, spiritual wakefulness is related primarily to his mind, and the whole point of this stage is to get beyond the habitual ignorance and drowsiness that dominate our infralapsarian thinking and perception. *Nepsis* signifies a total absence of dreaming. The “neptic” person is the one whose state of mind is completely free from illusion—free, in traditional terms, from *prelest* (a Russian word for “charm” or “beguilement”) or *planê* (the Greek equivalent, meaning literally “wandering”). This is a state, we’re told, in which the clarity of one’s spiritual vision surpasses that of our present so-called waking life to a degree even greater than that in which our waking life surpasses our sleep.

Understanding what this state is like, let alone gaining some initial experience of it, is exceedingly difficult. Most of us think we’re awake right now! But according to the spiritual masters of the Christian East, to be truly awake—to have a truly *neptic* awareness—is something much, much higher and more profound than we imagine. Ware connects this state, and its corresponding *physiki* or *illuminatio*, with the idea of being “present where we are”, being “gathered into the here and now”, and participating in the “sacrament of the present moment” (114-15). But did you consider, as you read those phrases, how very hard it is to be “here and now” and hence how rare real “presence” is? How is one to think and to see and to feel and to speak and to *be* only right *now* and only right *here*? Anyone who’s ever attempted to concentrate upon a single object or image or thought will know from experience how utterly *unawake* and *inattentive* we ordinarily are. Nearly all our moments of so-called consciousness are spent in either remembering the past or anticipating the future—replaying, for example, what so and so said to us

yesterday, or fretting over what might happen tomorrow—and not in being fully aware in the *present*. Make a serious attempt to focus with all your concentration upon one thing only, and within just a very few seconds—maximum!—you’ll find that your mind has wandered (see *planê* above) and that you’ve dozingly forgotten your task, much as one might fall asleep at the wheel of a car. From trying to think about X (whatever that might be), you begin to think about your thinking about X, and then about the fact that you’re thinking about your thinking about X, and then about how much X is like Y, and about how the last time you saw Y it was lying on the kitchen table, and then about what you last had to eat, and about how hungry you are, and about the itch on your abdomen, and about stomachs in general, and hence about that biology dissection report that’s due tomorrow, and so on and on. And then—my goodness!—you remember that you were supposed to be concentrating on X, and perhaps only ten seconds have passed. This we are pleased to call our “waking” life!

With a mind so enslaved and so out of control, is it any wonder that we’re usually so unaware of the deep significance of the things around us, that we’re so seldom attuned to the colors and textures and tastes and sounds of this glorious world, that we’re so submerged in the chaos of our own inner world that we don’t really hear what people are saying to us, what their hopes and needs really are? In the Reader, the author of *The Way of a Pilgrim* tells us that, when he was praying, “everything around me seemed delightful and marvelous. The trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air, the light seemed to be telling me that ... they witnessed to the love of God for man, that everything proved the love of God for man, that all things prayed to God and sang His praise.... I saw the means by which converse could be held with God’s creatures” (173). If we don’t see things this way—if we don’t share in this vision (as did Francis and other great saints who had learned, like the Pilgrim, to “converse” with God’s creatures)—the fault is completely our own, say the Christian masters of prayer.

Alright, all this sounds great, you might say, but what are we to *do* about it? How is one to enter into these very desirable, very exalted states of consciousness? Such questions naturally lead to a consideration of my second main topic in this lecture, namely, invocatory prayer. One consistent answer the Tradition has always given in response to this query can be found in its teaching about invocation. Perhaps I should say,

before going any further, that in focusing on this special kind of prayer, I don't mean to neglect or disparage the value of other more familiar forms of prayer—especially personal prayer, in which a Christian formulates his individual needs or expressions of gratitude for God's assistance and kindness. If, however, one is looking for a form or a method of prayer that's specifically designed to assist in the transformation of consciousness and to lead to a final, deifying union with God, what's recommended most often, especially in the Orthodox East, is invocatory prayer. Ware has called our attention to this type of prayer at least twice before in his book: first in his discussion of the Trinity in Chapter 2 (38), and second near the beginning of the chapter on "God as Man" (68-69). He speaks of it here again, in Chapter 6, calling it an "arrow prayer" (122-23). The mode of orison he has in mind is more typically referred to as invocatory, or sometimes monologic, prayer. It's a form of prayer, in other words, in which one repeatedly "calls upon" God or "calls" Him "into" one's heart (hence the term "in-vocatory"), and one does this by using either a single word (thus "mono-logic"), a single short phrase, or a collection of such phrases, which are rhythmically repeated as a support for meditation.

Roman Catholics often use a form of invocatory prayer known as the Rosary, named for the string of beads that are used for counting repetitions of the component parts of the prayer. First, the Lord's Prayer is recited once. Then comes the Angelic Salutation or "Hail Mary" (*Ave Maria*), which consists of the words: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee [see Luke 1:28]; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus [see Luke 1:42]. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of death. Amen." This is repeated ten times. Finally, the Doxology is recited one time: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." This entire sequence is traditionally repeated fifteen times, with each of these repetitions linked to meditation on a particular event (called a "mystery") in the life of Christ or His mother.

The best known of all Christian invocatory prayers, however, is the Jesus Prayer. This is the form of invocation most often used in the Orthodox Church, and it's this prayer (as you know) that Ware discusses. The Jesus Prayer can be traced back to two parables recorded in the Gospel of Luke (18:1-14). Christ admonishes His disciples that

“men ought always to pray”, and then as if to illustrate what He means He tells them two stories. The first concerns an “unjust judge” who at length gives in to the continual pleas of a widow who’s been wronged. What is true of this judge, says Christ, is all the more true of God, who has mercy upon those who “cry day and night unto Him”. Then, spelling out what or how one should “cry” to God, He tells a second parable about a publican or tax collector, who unlike a boastful Pharisee beats his breast in humility when he prays, saying quite simply, “God, be merciful to me a sinner”—a petition echoed in real life by a blind man named Bartimaeus, whom Jesus encounters on the road to Jericho, and who begs, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47). Given that Jesus is not only the “son of David” but also the divine Son of God—*Yeshua* (“Jesus”) in fact means “God saves” in Hebrew—the eastern Christian Tradition derives the Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”, a prayer that one is instructed to repeat as often as the widow’s plea: that is, “day and night”, or simply “always”.

As Ware explains in our book, the use of this prayer—or another similar invocatory formula—is meant to lead a person through three distinct levels or degrees, and we can see evidence of each in the Pilgrim’s description of his own experience. First comes prayer of the lips, the technique with which the Pilgrim began, when he was instructed to repeat the words of the formula several thousand times a day. Then comes prayer of the intellect or mental prayer, the kind of orison the Pilgrim experiences when the invocation starts to wake him up in the morning. “It was as though my lips and my tongue pronounced the words entirely of themselves without any urging from me” (163). Finally there is prayer of the heart, or prayer of the intellect in the heart, a level of contemplation in which the prayer becomes “self-acting”, and where—in Ware’s words—“the soul rests in God without a constantly varying succession of images, ideas, and feelings” (123). This highest of levels is described by the Pilgrim when he explains how his heart “began to say the words of the Prayer within at each beat.... I gave up saying the Prayer with my lips. I simply listened carefully to what my heart was saying” (166). “Now,” he says, “I knew the meaning of the words ‘the Kingdom of God is within you’” (179).

His descriptions of the full fruit of this practice suggest that the Pilgrim had begun to enter into that ultimate union with and participation in God which is the final goal of the spiritual journey. He'd begun to realize, at the deepest level of experience, that true Prayer "is" God.

More on this subject when we see each other in class.

## Lecture 21: The Resurrection

In coming to the end of Ware's book, the Epilogue on "God as Eternity", we're also coming to the end of the world. Or at least—to be more precise and less shocking!—to that branch of systematic theology which considers what will happen at the end of the world and which attempts to understanding what this end will mean for man in his relation with God. We call this branch of theology *eschatology*, a word derived from the Greek adjective *eschaton*, meaning last or furthest. Eschatology is thus the study of the last things. Or rather, more precisely, it's the study of those things that will appear to come last from our present temporal and terrestrial perspective. Recalling Christ's teaching, however, that "the last shall be first" (Matt. 20:16), we could equally say that eschatology is the study of *first* things, the first things of the future, things that will occur on the verge of the afterlife. Eschatology looks at our concluding days of life on earth and at the sequence of events and signs that the Scriptures predict will occur in those days. But at the same time—to use the words with which the Nicene Creed concludes—it's also concerned with "the life of the world to come". And of course that being so, eschatology is naturally interested, too, in the transition from the one to the other: in how the last becomes first, and thus in our movement between these two worlds. The Christian term for this transition or movement is *resurrection*, and it's the task of eschatology to help us understand what resurrection entails. This is the focus of the materials in the Reader: something by Lewis, as always, and selection from the third century Church father Origen, whose theodicy we touched on back in Lecture 10. The principal concern of both authors is the meaning and the implications of the resurrection.

To return one final time to my Outline of Systematic Theology, you could say that the transition or transformation that the resurrection refers to is in part the transformation of II.B back into II.A—of man as he *is* into man as he *was*. The resurrection coincides with this transformation only "in part", however, because our movement from this world to the next, according to the Christian Tradition, is going to involve an even greater change than the outline suggests, or perhaps I should say even greater and subtler

*changes*. To say simply that II.B is restored to II.A is to ignore at least three important facts about the resurrection, each of which is essential to Christian eschatology.

First of all, man isn't the only thing that will change: the entire universe is to be transformed. According to St Paul, "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). In the words of the last book of the Bible, there will be "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). Ware makes the point this way: "Man is not saved *from* his body but *in* it; not saved *from* the material world but *with* it. Because man is microcosm and mediator of the creation, his own salvation involves also the reconciliation and transfiguration of the whole animate and inanimate creation around him—its deliverance 'from the bondage of corruption' [quoting the same passage in Paul] and entry 'into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom 8:21). In the 'new earth' of the Age to come there is surely a place not only for man but for the animals: in and through man, they too will share in immortality, and so will rocks, trees and plants, fire and water" (136-37).

A second eschatological teaching our outline doesn't fully (or explicitly) capture has to do with the fact that not everyone will necessarily be changed by the resurrection for the *better*. To speak only of the transformation of II.B to II.A makes it sound as if all of us are automatically going to become what we should be. But as most of you surely know, this isn't what traditional Christianity says. All men and women will indeed be changed, and they will all in some fashion participate in the general movement from this world to the next. But that doesn't mean they're all going straight to Heaven. According to the Scriptures, the end of this earthly life will be good news for some people, but bad news for others, for there's not only a Heaven but also a hell. I'll be returning to a discussion of these and other post-mortem destinations in my next lecture.

Finally, a third point about the Christian perspective which the outline doesn't clearly show us is that the transformation in question is *not a sheer reversal*. It's not simply a restoration of people, even of "good" people, to humanity's pre-fallen state. We've touched on this subtle but important insight before. As Christianity sees it, the ultimate sanctification, perfection, or deification of man will consist in his being lifted to a level even higher than that of Adam and Eve in their supralapsarian paradise. The sinlessness of the first human beings went hand in hand with the naiveté of spiritual

childhood, but in the deified person moral purity will be undergirded and rendered inviolable by the full strength and wisdom of mature adulthood. As you may remember, back in the chapter on “God as Creator”, Ware anticipated this difference when he called our attention to the distinction between the words *image* and *likeness*. “By many of the Greek fathers,” he wrote, “a distinction is drawn between the ‘image’ of God and the ‘likeness’ of God. The image, for those who distinguish the two terms, denotes man’s *potentiality* for life in God; the likeness, his *realization* of that potentiality. The image is that which man possesses from the beginning, and which enables him to set out in the first place upon the spiritual Way; the likeness is that which he hopes to attain at his journey’s end.” And then Ware goes on to quote a passage from Origen that I’ve included in the Reader: “‘Man received the honor of [God’s] image at his first creation [II.A of the outline], but the full perfection of God’s likeness will only be conferred upon him at the consummation of all things’” (51-52; see Reader, 196-97).

In any case, to repeat: according to traditional Christian doctrine, the resurrection will certainly include a change from II.B to II.A, but we have to remember that this change affects *more* than just man, that there’s *more* to it than an unequivocal goodness, and that it’s *more* than just a return to the way things were in Eden.

I’m stressing the word *more* in summarizing these points partly to underscore them in your minds, but also because the idea of a “more”—of something greater—is intimately linked to the resurrection itself, which (says the Christian) is by its very nature beyond anything we could ever imagine. All three of our authors—Origen, Lewis, and Ware—go out of their way to accentuate the awe-inspiring nature of the transformation in question. Origen, for example, quotes [Reader, 200] what is perhaps the most important of Biblical texts with regard to the afterlife: “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what things God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). Both Origen and Ware also refer to the words of 1 John: “Little children, we know not yet what we shall be” (1 John 3:2; Reader, 197; Ware, 133). And Lewis echoes the same idea, adding a note of warning: “All your life an unattainable ecstasy has hovered just beyond the grasp of your consciousness. The day is coming when you will wake to find, beyond all hope, that you have attained it, or else, that it was within your reach and you have lost it forever.... The thing I am speaking of is not an

experience. You have experienced only the *want* of it. The thing itself has never actually been embodied in any thought, or image, or emotion. Always it has summoned you out of yourself” (Reader, 207). Ware puts yet a further stress on this point. “We have only partial glimpses but no clear conception; and so we should speak always with caution, respecting the need for silence” (133-34).

If I were to quote from other traditional authorities, you would see that this insistence on caution and silence is a consistent theme among theologians, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox. They’re virtually unanimous in recognizing the mind’s utter helplessness in the face of something as overwhelming as the End of the World. The Swiss philosopher of religion Frithjof Schuon writes, “Man cannot possibly draw on his past to bear witness to anything of the kind, any more than a may-fly can expatiate on the alteration of the seasons; the rising of the sun can in no way enter into the habitual sensations of a creature born at midnight whose life will last but a day; the sudden appearance of the orb of the sun, unforeseeable by reference to any analogous phenomenon that had occurred during the long hours of darkness, would seem like an unheard of apocalyptic prodigy. And it is thus that God will come. There will be nothing but this one advent, this one presence, and by it the world of experiences will be shattered” (*Light on the Ancient Worlds*). This undisputed recognition that the *eschaton* will inevitably “shatter” all human categories helps to explain why the Tradition has always been hesitant to specify precisely what one has to believe when it comes to eschatology. In order to be a Christian, a person must obviously believe in God, in the Trinity, in the Creation of the world out of nothing, in the Incarnation, and in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. But one is not obliged to hold to any particular theory as to how exactly the resurrection will be accomplished or about the precise nature or structure of the life after death.

This is not to say that the whole subject is simply up for grabs. There are certainly some basic points of eschatological doctrine that Christians do agree on. They agree, most importantly, that Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven, will Himself return to this earth in what theologians call His *parousia*. This is a Greek term meaning advent or arrival. It was used in ancient times to refer to an official state visit by a king to his provinces. When applied to Christ (as in Matt. 24:27) it refers to what

Christians call the Second Coming. Christ came a *first* time a little over two millennia ago when He was born as a baby in Bethlehem. But He promised in the Scriptures to come a *second* time at some point in the future, returning in the same body He had before, but this time as a full-grown adult—by-passing the “swaddling clothes” (Luke 2:7) stage!—and with a manifest power and kingly sovereignty. Christians agree furthermore that this *parousia* or return of Christ will be connected in some way with a great cosmic instauration or transformation, which we find described (among other places) in Matthew 24. On one level, the transformation will be heralded by the action of political and military forces, for there will be “wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:6), and “nation will rise against nation” (Matt. 24:7). On another, much deeper level, the change will be accompanied by physical and astronomical causes: “There will be famines and earthquakes in various places” (Matt. 24:7) on earth, and in outer space (as we call it) “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven” (Matt. 24:29).

But even “more” than this, on a more spine-tingling level yet, the Tradition tells us that the entire matrix of space and time as we know it is going to be turned inside out, as it were, in an irruption of the purely miraculous. This is what St Paul means when he says that “the form of this world” is going to “pass away” (1 Cor. 7:31). I suspect most of us tend to think that this earth and our bodies are solid things that can be destroyed or transformed only by forces acting on the same basic level—in other words, only by masses and energies belonging to the physical universe studied by science. What we fail to realize, if we think in this fashion, is that the universe of our present experience, which seems so solid and real, is actually a construction of our fallen consciousness and that, with the Second Coming of Christ, the illusion will be unmasked, and the world will simply collapse from within. Matter will implode, space itself will collapse like a balloon suddenly emptied of air, and time will be stopped in its tracks. Perhaps—as certain doomsayers predict—this transformation will be precipitated, or at least prefigured, by a great war in the Middle East, or by a nuclear holocaust, or by some tremendous ecological disaster. But none of these things or anything like them, taken either on their own or together, could ever account for the universal *unmaking* of things that Christianity expects to take place when Jesus returns.

As long as I'm on the subject of predictions, perhaps I should add another important eschatological point: Christ's *parousia* is not something that can be dated. There have been a number of Christians who supposed it could be. One well-known example was the nineteenth century Baptist preacher William Miller, who announced in 1831 that Christ would return and the world would end in 1843. You won't be surprised to learn that most of the Millerites, as they were called, rather quickly disbanded in 1844. Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses have sometimes inclined to such speculations as well. But from the traditional Christian point of view, all such people would be well advised to take note of two texts: Acts 1:6 and Matthew 24:36. In Acts, Christ tells His disciples, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority." And in Matthew He adds, "Of that day and hour [that is, the day and hour of His return] no one knows, not even the angels of Heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." It's true of course, as we've noted already, that Jesus *does* speak about certain signs of the end-time, and it's also true that from the very beginning, from the apostles on down, Christians have had a sense that the end of the world was imminent, just around the corner. But this is very different from trying to arrange a sort of schedule for God. Rather the aim has been to maintain what Ware calls "a sense of urgency" (134), a sense—you might say—of Divine proximity. For obviously, whether or not the universe will come to an end in a Christian's own lifetime, this lifetime itself will come to an end. Each of us, to speak more pointedly, is going to die, and at the moment of death we're each going to experience a kind a personal *eschaton* and a "microcosmic" *parousia*. Theology has traditionally concerned itself with describing the end of the world as a way of encouraging people to take their own ends more seriously and to prepare themselves more carefully for that inevitable moment. (Note the last paragraph of p. 134 in *The Orthodox Way*.)

Another point which Ware makes, and which needs to be emphasized, concerns the difference between Christian and secular understandings of the direction or trajectory of history. While they don't always agree on the details, traditional Christians do agree that the overall movement of history is downhill, not up. (In this respect, I might add, Christianity is of one mind with all the other major world religions, none of which has anything in common with the modern, humanistic belief in historical progress, and none

of which teaches that man will one day achieve a kind of heaven on earth.) Traditional Christian eschatology is, if you will, entropic in character, utterly rejecting the notion of progress and all idealistic or utopian views of the future. As Ware says, “Scripture and Holy Tradition ... give us no grounds for supposing that, through a steady advance of ‘civilization’, the world will grow gradually better and better until mankind succeeds in establishing God’s kingdom upon earth. The Christian view of world history is entirely opposed to this kind of evolutionary optimism. What we are taught to expect are disasters in the world of nature, increasingly destructive warfare between men, bewilderment and apostasy among those who call themselves Christians.” Finally, he concludes this bracing paragraph, “the course of history will be brought to a sudden and dramatic end, through a direct intervention from the Divine realm” (134).

I should also mention in passing, since some of you may be surprised at this way of looking at things, that the radical contradiction between Christian eschatology and modern secular humanism is often obscured in our day by certain Christians themselves, who think it’s possible to combine Darwinian evolutionary theory with a Christian perspective. But in fact it’s impossible to have it both ways. Either the physical universe is the only reality and man has ascended from a lower, subhuman source through a process of natural selection acting on purely random mutations, or this universe is not the only reality, but has descended, with man, from a higher, superhuman source through a process of Creation and Fall. If you accept the former point of view, you’ll naturally expect (or at least hope) that human beings might continue to “evolve” and improve their lot in the world as the future unfolds. If on the other hand you favor the latter perspective, you’ll instead be resigned to the fact that the universe is doomed to a kind of devolution, and your hopes for that universe will be based, not on any human or naturalistic achievement, but on the Divine intervention provided by Christ’s Second Coming.

While I’m talking about the sort of things people pin their hopes on, I want to say just a few words on a related subject that can be confusing for many contemporary Christians. As I’m sure you know there’s a great deal of discussion in our day about near death experiences. Numerous authors have written on the topic, and quite a number of people, both Christian and otherwise, seem to be fascinated by the topic. The claim one often hears is that these experiences are a proof of life after death. Someone is in a car

accident, let's say, or undergoes a dangerous surgical procedure, and during the course of this event he "dies" the death that's defined by our current technology. There's no evidence of electrical activity in his brain and no other discernible vital signs. But then, lo and behold! He wakes up, much to the surprise of his doctors, and tells everybody what a wonderful time he's just had: how he's seen lights and heard comforting voices and been ushered through beautiful halls by resplendent figures in flowing gowns, and so forth.

Mind you, I don't mean to deny that people have had such life changing experiences, and some of them, because of what they've seen, may have begun taking religion more seriously, which is doubtless a good thing. Nevertheless NDE's, as they're called by those who study them—"Near Death Experiences"—remain finally irrelevant to any specifically Christian understanding of life after death. In the first place, Christians have no need to be assured about survival or immortality. Christianity teaches that the soul of every man is immortal, and the real question is therefore not whether one will continue to live after death, but rather in what state he will live, into what kind of being and into what relation with God he will enter after concluding his life in this world. Another problem with our culture's fascination with NDE's, though it's seldom discussed, is that the experiences of people who end up regaining consciousness are surely different, in some respect at least, from the experiences of those who've really died and don't wake up. It would therefore be a mistake to place too much stock in what they say. The fact that such people almost always report sensations of peace and bliss and light while in these altered states of consciousness does nothing but confirm what every authentic spiritual tradition knew already: namely, that a soul newly detached from its fallen body will naturally experience an initial freedom of movement or flexibility it had not known before. The critical question, however, has to do with the inward state of that soul, for it's this which determines, after the first few moments of giddy liberation, what it will then do with its bodiless freedom—whether it will be free to be all the more vicious, like the demons, or all the more virtuous, like the angels. These, of course, aren't the sorts of questions that are usually asked on the talk shows! In any case, let me say once again: Christian eschatology isn't really interested in debates over the issue of "personal survival", and it's not interested for the simple reason that such survival is a given. We're all going to live after death, says the Christian—whether we like it or not—

and the only topic we need to concern ourselves with is what kind of life we'll have. For the Tradition is very clear that at the moment of death the roads diverge, and that we won't all proceed to the same destination.

Before going into a description of the destinations—which I'll do in my next lecture—we need to say something about how one gets there. Virtually all theologians, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox, make a distinction between two distinct points on the road to one's post-mortem destiny. These points are the particular judgment and the general judgment.

The first, the *particular judgment*, is said to occur either at the moment of death or very shortly thereafter, and it's closely bound up with God's initial assessment or evaluation of an individual's soul, based upon the person's faith and deeds in this world. As with most eschatological issues, there's no universally accepted doctrine as to the precise circumstances surrounding this first judgment. Most theologians would say, however—basing themselves on a combination of Biblical texts and traditional accounts of saints' lives—that the departed soul experiences a kind of inward illumination and is permitted to see its entire life in retrospect. Some contend that at this point one enters into an intermediate state of “soul sleep” or suspended consciousness, lasting until the resurrection of the individual's body. But the majority of Christians believe, and have always believed, that at the particular judgment the soul is assigned to an appropriate post-mortem state, whether of reward or punishment, and that it remains fully awake and conscious of that state. Grounds for this latter position are considerably stronger, and they include such passages as Philippians 1:23, where Paul expresses the wish “to depart and be with Christ”; Luke 23:43, where Christ tells the penitent thief, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”; and Luke 16:19-25, which is the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Both the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus die, and in the parable the rich man is very much aware of the fact that he has gone to hell, while the beggar has gone to Heaven. In fact the rich man is able to have a conversation with Abraham, who's also in Heaven, by calling out across the dividing abyss. On the basis of texts like this, most Christian authorities have taught that a person is fully conscious during the particular judgment and its aftermath.

On the other hand, even those who believe in the continuing consciousness of the soul after death are usually careful to emphasize that the full effects of the next life—the complete fruits of one’s time here on earth—will not be experienced until after the second point is reached in one’s post-mortem journey. This is the *general judgment*, a judgment that doesn’t take place until the Second Coming of Christ. According to traditional Christian belief, when Christ returns to earth all the dead—all the people who’ve ever lived on the earth—will be bodily resurrected, as Christ Himself was, and their risen bodies will be rejoined to their souls. “The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice [that is, the voice of Christ] and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28). Only at this point will people who’ve died be fully themselves again. As St Augustine says, “Only when the soul again receives this body will it have the perfect measure of its being” (*Commentary on Genesis*). Ware explains in the Epilogue, “The human soul and the human body are interdependent, and neither can properly exist without the other. In consequence of the fall, the two are parted at bodily death, but this separation is not final and permanent. At the Second Coming of Christ, we shall be raised from the dead in our soul and in our body; and so, with soul and body reunited, we shall appear before our Lord for the Last Judgment” (135). Apart from their bodies, men and women are not completely themselves, and it’s therefore not until the *parousia* and the general resurrection of all the dead that they can be completely judged. It’s not until then, in other words, that the full bliss of Heaven or the full pain of hell will truly begin.

Now having said all of this, two final distinctions or qualifications must be added. The first concerns the nature of time. We’ve drawn a distinction between two phases or stopping points on the way to one’s ultimate destiny, and the distinction is obviously a temporal one. “First” comes the particular judgment, and then “later on”, when Jesus returns at the end of the world, there’s the general judgment. But it’s important to understand that the temporal distance or lag between the two judgments is something that may or may not really apply from the point of view of the departed person himself. It’s an earthly way of speaking, and it may turn out to be completely irrelevant to what’s actually happening on the other side of the grave. It’s altogether plausible to suppose that

in leaving this life our souls will find themselves in a mode of existence where the temporal series is itself more flexible than it is here on earth. We know, after all, that for the Divine Mystery all time is *now*. Past, present, and future are to God equally present, and the sequence of days through which we seem to be passing only one at a time is not at all binding on Him. Therefore, when God “looks” at the moment of an individual’s death, He sees it in and through that other, seemingly “future” moment of Christ’s Second Coming. The two moments are in a sense two sides of one coin. This fact has led some theologians to wonder whether at the moment of its particular judgment the soul may not in some way share in God’s vision, seeing things from His point of view. And if that’s possible, this soul will perhaps find itself already positioned (as it were) at the future “moment” of the general judgment. Obviously it would be wrong to make too much of these speculations. We’re here face to face with one of those matters where, in Ware’s words, there’s a “need for silence” (134). On the other hand, though one shouldn’t insist on any specific picture of the process, it is good to realize that the distinction between a particular and a general judgment must itself be taken with a grain of salt.

A second qualification has to do with the body. Christians, we’ve said, believe in a bodily resurrection of all the dead. Ware has spoken of this doctrine several times throughout the book, notably (at the close of Chapter 4) in connection with Christ’s own rising from the grave, and he does so again in the Epilogue. He explained in the earlier chapter that Christians believe, not just that “Christ’s ‘spirit’ somehow lived on among His disciples”, but that “there was a genuine resurrection from the dead, in the sense that Christ’s human body was reunited to His human soul, and that the tomb was found to be empty” (84). Now here again at the end of his book, he returns to this doctrine: “As Christians we believe not only in the immortality of the soul but in the resurrection of the body” (135). If Ware had wished, he could have cited both Scripture and Creed in defense of this claim. He might have mentioned, for example, the words I’ve already quoted from John 5:28—“The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth.” And he might have called attention to the last line of the Nicene Creed: “I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”

So there can be no dispute that Christian doctrine definitely includes a belief in the resurrection of the body. At the same time, though, it's very clear that we're not to think of this body in a purely physical or material way. Christians have always assumed that the Gospel accounts concerning Christ's resurrected body provide a clue as to what everyone else's resurrected body will be like. But when we examine those accounts, we find that the body Christ brought back from the dead on Easter morning was in some very important respects quite different from the bodies we presently have—indeed, different from what we mean by “body”. On the one hand, it could eat and be touched, and in this respect it was certainly physical in nature. We're told in Luke 24:42-43 that the disciples “gave [Jesus] a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them”. And in John 20:27, the apostle Thomas is invited to touch Christ's side and hands so as to verify empirically that it was really the same person who (as he knew very well) had been crucified. On the other hand, the Scriptures reveal that this very same body passed initially unrecognized before the eyes of His own disciples (Luke 24:15-16), who had been with him on a daily basis for the past three years; that it was able to pass through closed doors, defying all the laws of Newtonian physics (Luke 24:30-31; John 20:19, 26); and that it was able to ascend into the sky when it's mission on earth was completed (Acts 1:9). The Gospel of Mark states explicitly that the resurrected Christ “appeared in another form” (Mark 16:12). So what does this say about the resurrection of the rest of us? A good deal, it seems, for Christians have always maintained that in the resurrected Christ they've been given a glimpse of their own future mode of existence. In the words of 1 John 3:2, “It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when [Christ] appears we shall be like Him”. But if that's so, it follows that when the physical remains of men and women are raised from the dead at the *parousia*, their bodies will also exhibit distinctly *non-terrestrial* properties.

This is a point of emphasis in the selection in the Reader from Origen. “Some men,” he writes, “consider that the promises of the future are to be looked for in the form of pleasure and bodily luxury.... They desire after the resurrection to have flesh of such a sort that they will never lack the power to eat and drink and to do all things that pertain to flesh and blood.... They desire that all things which they look for in the promises should correspond in every detail with the course of this [present] life, that is, that what exists

now should exist again” (189-90). As Origen sees it, however, such people are totally mistaken in supposing that the resurrected body is going to have the same kind of materiality as our bodies do now. He refers in particular to what St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection of a *spiritual body*. Comparing the death and resurrection of the body to the planting of a seed, Paul writes, “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:44). According to Origen this passage shows beyond doubt that the afterlife is going to bring with it something quite different from our present constitution. “This same body,” he writes, “having cast off the weaknesses of its present existence, will be transformed into a thing of glory and made spiritual” (202).

Ware says much the same in our book. “Matter as we know it in this fallen world, with all its inertness and opacity, does not at all correspond to matter as God intended it to be. Freed from the grossness of the fallen flesh, the resurrection body will share in the qualities of Christ’s human body at the Transfiguration and after the Resurrection” (136). Ware then quotes from another Church father, St Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315 - 86). I’ll leave it to you to re-read those provocative words on p. 136 of *The Orthodox Way*.

**Lecture 22:**  
**Post-Mortem Destinations**

Last time we embarked on a discussion of eschatology, the technical term theologians use to describe Christian teaching about the end of the world and the life after death. I explained that most Christians throughout history have counseled circumspection and silence, as Ware himself does in our book. Rather than requiring adherence to a set of specific formulations and dogmas, the Tradition has tended to leave such things more open-ended and fluid. All we can know for sure, most theologians have taught, is that Jesus Christ will return again to this earth, that His return or *parousia* will precipitate a cataclysmic transformation of the entire universe, and that this tremendous change will be the beginning of an entirely new kind of being, both for man and for all other creatures.

We also know that each of us is going to be judged and that this judgment will be based upon how we have lived our lives here on earth and the degree to which we have taken advantage of Christ's saving work. I distinguished between two judgments, or two key moments in the process of judging: the particular judgment and the general judgment. The Christian is taught that the first of these will occur in association with his own individual death, whereas the second will happen at the return of Christ. According to most theologians, in the intervening "time" between these two judgments the soul of the departed person remains conscious of itself and its state of existence, although it's only "after" the resurrection of our "body" that we begin to participate fully in the rewards or the punishments we have merited. Of course—and this is the point of those quotation marks in the lines I've just written—what exactly time is going to mean on the other side of the grave, and what precisely our bodies will be like, are among the matters one simply can't be sure of right now. What we do know is that God exists beyond time, and some have reasoned that perhaps a more immediate association with Him will mean that man, too, escapes from the temporal series. We also know that in Jesus's case the resurrected body was very different from the kind of bodies we presently have, so it seems a good bet that in our case as well the relationship between spirit and matter will be altogether other than what we experience now.

In any case, the particular and general judgments—keeping these reservations and subtleties in mind—may be said to constitute the two major stages or milestones on the road that we’ll all have to travel toward our various post-mortem destinations. Let’s focus now on those destinations themselves.

The plural, of course, is essential—destinations—for according to Christianity there’s more than one place we might go. The Bible is very explicit in teaching that after a man’s death there’s a major fork in the road. The road will divide, and one path will lead those who take it toward the greatest, most ecstatic happiness, while the other will lead its followers toward the greatest, most horrific misery. Perhaps the most important of scriptural texts for this teaching is found in Matthew 25. “When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and He will place the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at His left. Then the King will say to those at His right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’.... Then He will say to those at His left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal [*aiônion*] fire prepared for the devil and his angels’.... And they will go away into eternal [*aiônion*] punishment, but the righteous into eternal [*aiônion*] life” (Matt. 25:31-46). What we’re talking about, of course—in plainer prose—are the destinations called Heaven and hell. Some people, says the Christian Tradition, are going to Heaven, while other people (unfortunately) are going to hell.

We need to try to understand what this means, and I think it would be helpful, first of all, to make a couple brief comments on the use of these terms in the Bible.

The word *heaven*, in both the Old and New Testaments, can denote at least two things. It means on the one hand the visible sky. This is the literal meaning of *shamayim*, a Hebrew plural form used in the Old Testament (for example, Gen. 1:1), as well as of *ouranos*, its Greek equivalent in the New Testament. Heaven thus refers to the bright blue vault of the day or the star-studded blackness of night. On the other hand it can also refer to the invisible dwelling-place of God and His angels, who are often represented in Scripture as existing beyond or above the sky that we can see with our eyes. Using the word in the first sense, the Bible tells us (for example) that in praying Christ would

sometimes raise His eyes toward heaven, as when He fed the five thousand by miraculously multiplying the loaves of bread and the fish: “And taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people” (Mark 6:41). The word also seems to be used in this mainly spatial sense in the account of Christ’s Ascension, when He appeared to the disciples to vanish in an upward direction. “As they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9-11). On the other hand the word is sometimes used in the Bible in a way that isn’t primarily spatial, physical, or empirical. When (for example) Christ teaches the disciples to pray the words “Our Father, who art in Heaven”, it would be silly to think that the First Person of the Trinity is somehow confined to the sky, or even to what we now call outer space. Obviously the “Heaven” of the Lord’s Prayer, in which the Father resides, must be something more than just astronomical or sidereal space, or else it couldn’t hold the Divine Infinitude. This observation is supported by the words of Solomon, who uses the term in its previous physical sense when he says, “Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee” (1 Kings 8:27). Further proof of this point can be found in the fact that, in the synoptic gospels at least, the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is used interchangeably with the phrase “kingdom of God”. Moreover, in Luke’s gospel, Christ says explicitly that the Divine kingdom is not “to be observed”, for “the kingdom of God is *within* you” (Luke 17:20-21). In pondering what it might mean to “go to Heaven”, we should take care to guard against thinking of the process in purely locomotive and spatial terms. I’ll come back to this point momentarily.

Turning to the word *hell* in the scriptures, we find that it too can signify either one of two things. In the Old Testament, where it’s usually a translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, hell means simply the abode of the dead, the place to which all people go at the end of their life, without reference to whether they’re being rewarded or punished. We see an example of this usage in 1 Samuel 2:6: “The Lord kills and brings to life; He brings down to hell and raises up.” In the New Testament, the word *hell* has this same

more or less neutral meaning when it serves as a translation of the Greek term *hades*. An instance of this can be found in Revelation 20:13, where we're told that "Death and hell [*hades*] gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done." The word is also used in this sense in the Apostles' Creed, where Christians confess their belief that Jesus Christ, "who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried", then "descended into hell". The creed is referring to what is sometimes called the harrowing of hell, which the Tradition says took place after Christ's crucifixion and before His resurrection. Liturgically speaking, this is Holy Saturday, the "day" when Christ descended to the realm of the dead in order to offer salvation to those who'd lived righteous lives on earth. I'll also return to this idea a bit later in this lecture.

On the other hand, the word *hell* has another, more familiar, and more distinctly negative meaning in Scripture. This second usage is more common in the New Testament, where the English term *hell* is usually a translation of the Greek word *gehenna*. In this case it refers to a place of retribution and punishment for the wicked. This is the meaning, for example, in Luke 12:4-5. Christ says, "Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell." Or again in Matthew 23:15, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves." Understood in this second sense, hell is pictured in the Bible as a state that includes both loneliness and pain. We see this in a traditional Catholic distinction between two kinds of *poena*, or punishment. Those in hell will experience on the one hand a *poena damni*, a "punishment of loss", which refers to the despair unrepentant sinners feel at God's apparent absence or distance. (In Dante's *Inferno*, there's a sign over the gate of hell, saying, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.") It's this dimension of hell that Christ is speaking of when He talks about people being cast into "the outer darkness" (Matt. 22:13). But hell also includes a *poena sensus*, a "punishment of the senses". Besides the utter hopelessness of their situation, the damned are said to experience agonizing pain, both physical—remember that they too will have resurrected bodies—and psychological. Here again the teaching is based on the

words of Christ Himself, who pulls no punches in describing what's in store for the "goats", as for example in Matthew 13:41-42: "The Son of man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all evil-doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth."

Now of course, just as in the case of Heaven, so also with hell: it's by no means necessary for the Bible's imagery to be taken literally or spatially. It needn't be supposed, in other words, that there are going to be literal "flames" in hell—I once saw a billboard outside a church that read: "Stop, drop, and roll won't work down below!"—or that there will be literal "streets" of gold in Heaven. And we needn't suppose that a dead man actually travels physically to some celestial location—until the general resurrection, after all, he has no body to be physical *in*—nor should we think that either of these destinies, either Heaven or hell, lies in some specific direction from our present position on the planet's surface. Because "heaven" can also signify the sky, it's always been customary for Christians to picture Heaven as "up", and it's likewise customary to think of hell as "down"—the former *supernal* and the latter *infernal*. One of the best known and most widely influential examples of this symbolism can be found in the poet Dante's *Inferno*, which I've already mentioned. Hell is pictured there as a huge, funnel-shaped pit, situated beneath the Northern Hemisphere, and running down to the center of the earth. In his *Paradiso*, on the other, Heaven is reached by going up, ascending through the spheres of the seven planets, past the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, and on beyond even the stars. Dante himself, however, would have been the first to insist that spatial directions are here being used symbolically. He knew, like any theologian worth his salt, that both Heaven and hell are primarily inward realities or spiritual states, and not the sort of compartments or places you can designate on a graph or a grid.

According to Christ—I've already quoted the passage from Luke 17—the kingdom of Heaven is *within*. But so also is hell. Consider Christ's words in Mark 7:20-23: "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man." Hell itself isn't explicitly mentioned in this list, but it's not too much of a stretch, if "all evil things come from within", to deduce that hell, too, is a product or function of man's own

inward state. Please understand, though: in using the phrase “inward state” and in rejecting the literal sense of the images, the theologian doesn’t at all mean to diminish the profound and powerful effects that Heaven and hell have upon those who are in those states. The point is simply to underscore what the Psalmist means when he says to God, “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there!” (Ps. 139:8).

As we learned many weeks ago in discussing Chapter 1 of *The Orthodox Way*, “God as Mystery”, and as this passage makes clear, God—being infinite—is inescapable, and it therefore makes no sense to define Heaven or hell in terms of their spatial relation to Him. What we’re talking about are opposite responses to the very same Presence. A contemporary Catholic philosopher and theologian, Peter Kreeft, has a provocative and amusing little book called *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven: But Never Dreamed of Asking*. In that book he makes much the same point: “In reality, the damned are in the same place as the saved—in reality! But they hate it; it is their Hell. The saved loved it, and it is their Heaven. It is like two people sitting side by side at an opera or a rock concert: the very thing that is Heaven to one is Hell to the other. Dostoyevski says, ‘We are all in paradise, but we won’t see it’ [*The Brothers Karamazov*]. Hell is not thrust upon us from without. Hell grows up from within, a spiritual cancer. It emerges from our freedom.... Hell is not literally the ‘wrath of God’. The love of God is an objective fact; the ‘wrath of God’ is a human projection of our own wrath upon God ... a disastrous misinterpretation of God’s love as wrath” (134-35).

This symbolical perspective implies, among other things, that Heaven and hell actually start here on earth. We said last time that the particular judgment is the moment when one or the other of these post-mortem conditions begins, conditions fully experienced, however, only after the general judgment. But even before the particular judgment, and thus before death itself, people are in some sense already living in the states they’re destined for. Heaven and hell are *pre-*, and not only *post-*, mortem possibilities. (Ware fully agrees; see what he says in the second and third full paragraphs on p. 135.) In any case, summing things up to this point, we could define *Heaven* as a selfless and bliss-bestowing acceptance of God, an acceptance commencing even now in

this life and culminating at some point after death; whereas *hell* could be defined as an egoistic and pain-inducing rejection of God, also beginning in one's present life but also approaching the radical depths of its consequences only at a point beyond the grave.

And yet—those two words again!—things aren't quite as simple as that. As is so often the case in theology, there's another level of complexity that needs considering. I noted earlier that the Bible is very explicit as to the existence of two post-mortem states of existence, and for this reason all Christians believe in both Heaven and hell. On the other hand, they don't all believe that these two are the only post-mortem states, nor do they all believe that these two states are equally final or permanent. In my next (and last) lecture, I'll share with you some thoughts about the second of these disputed questions—the question, that is, of whether Heaven and hell are equally final. In the remainder of this lecture, however, I would like to focus on the first of these issues and to sketch in particular what the Roman Catholic Church says about life after death. Catholic theology presents Christianity's most detailed and elaborate eschatology, going further than either Protestants or Orthodox in its claims about what can, and should, be believed about the future life. According to traditional Catholic theologians, St Thomas Aquinas among them, there are *five* different states of existence into which a person might enter at death. Three of these are generally understood to be final or permanent, while two are believed to be temporary. We've already discussed two of these states, namely, Heaven and hell, but in addition to these, says the Catholic tradition, there are two further modes of being called limbos as well as a third known as purgatory.

The word *limbo* comes over into English from the Latin phrase *in limbo*. The second word in that phrase is the ablative form of *limbus*, which means border, margin, or edge. To be in limbo is to be on the boundary or border, and what the term “boundary” here signifies is a kind of middle zone between Heaven and hell. According to St Thomas, there are two ways of existing on this boundary. One is the *limbus patrum*, and the other the *limbus infantum*. The first is the “boundary of the fathers”, and it's taken to be the place where those who lived righteous lives before the coming of Christ were sent prior to His saving descent to the dead. The *limbus patrum* is a sort of subsection of *sheol* or *hades*—or, more precisely, it *was* a subsection. For now that Christ has harrowed hell and offered salvation to its inhabitants, this first of the limbos is an empty set, and no

longer a post-mortem option. The second boundary condition, however, is still a possible destination, or so at least Aquinas taught. This is the *limbus infantum*, the “boundary of the infants”, and it’s the name in traditional Catholic thought for the place where people go who’ve committed no personal sin, but who die without ever having been baptized and who therefore remain defiled by the stain of original sin. Obviously, the vast majority of human beings in this category, if not all of them, are going to be little children, who’ve not yet reached the age of accountability. This explains the name: the boundary or edge of the *infants*. Babies don’t deserve the punishments of hell, for they’re innocent of any personal sin. On the other hand, if they were never baptized, they remain infected by their parents’ sin—recall that in the traditional Catholic perspective, going back to Augustine, sin is transmitted biologically—and for this reason they can’t be granted the full blessedness of life in Heaven. So they must remain instead, for all eternity, on the border between these two conditions, where (according to St Thomas) they experience a maximum of natural happiness but without the privilege of seeing God Himself.

Now I should add at once that while this is generally accepted as the traditional Catholic position, the existence of the limbos was never formally defined as a dogma by the Roman Church—in other words, it was never said that a Christian must accept the idea as a condition of true and faithful membership in the Church—and it’s a teaching which, following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), most Catholics no longer hold.

There’s another post-mortem state, however, which is not just a matter of pious opinion for Catholics, and this is a condition or mode of existence called *purgatory*. (I realize some modernist Catholics don’t accept this doctrine either, and I’ve had Catholic students tell me they didn’t believe it themselves. Be that as it may, purgatory is still defined by the *magisterium*—the official teaching authority of the Roman church—as an essential dogma of the Catholic faith.) The word “purgatory” comes from the Latin verb *purgare*, which means to purge or cleanse. It refers to a post-mortem state of punishment, correction, and spiritual growth, where those who have died in a state of grace make amends for their remaining faults before being admitted to Heaven. Purgatory, please understand, is not a place of probation from which the soul, depending on its conduct there, may then continue on to either Heaven or hell. In Catholic doctrine, all the people who are admitted to purgatory have already been baptized here on earth, have been fully

justified by virtue of their faith in Christ, and are therefore bound to end up in Heaven either sooner or later. They are, in other words, irrevocably beyond the reach of damnation.

The existence of purgatory—as Catholic theologians themselves admit—cannot be explicitly proved from the Scriptures, which is why the doctrine is usually rejected by Protestants. All the same, there are several passages that do seem to imply or suggest the idea. The Old Testament text most often cited is 2 Maccabees 12:39-45, where Judas Maccabaeus, after a great battle, is said to have “made a reconciliation for the dead in order that they might be delivered from sin” (12:45). In the New Testament Christ’s words concerning the sin against the Holy Spirit, which can be forgiven (He says) “neither in this world, nor in the world to come” (Matt. 12:32), seem to imply that there must be other sins, presumably less grave in character, which can be forgiven in the world to come, or else He wouldn’t have mentioned the possibility. This too suggests the existence of a corresponding purgatorial state. Often quoted by Catholics as well are the following words of St Paul: “The fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation [of Christ] survives, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:14-15).

Among the Church fathers, a doctrine of post-mortem purification can be found as early as the late second century in the writings of St Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 - c. 215). Clement asserts that those who repent on their deathbeds and are baptized, but who have had no time to be sanctified during their earthly life, will be punished in the next life by what he calls (following the verse I just quoted from Paul) a “cleansing fire” (*Stromateis*, 7.6). There are similar indications in the teaching of Origen. He writes, “Even though a man may have departed out of this life insufficiently instructed, but with a record of acceptable works, he can be instructed in the city of the saints” (Reader, 191). Origen seems to be thinking of a kind of purgatory that is itself a part of Heaven—one of the lower “mansions”, as it were, in keeping with Christ’s promise that “in my Father’s house are many mansions” (John 14:2). Origen also speaks about a “school for souls” after death (194), and elsewhere, in his well-known treatise *On Prayer*, he comments on Christ’s words in Matthew 5:26, “Truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have

paid the last penny”, by explaining that certain “souls receive in prison, not [only] the retribution of their folly, but a benefaction in the purification from the evils contracted in that folly—a purification effected by means of salutary troubles” (*On Prayer*, 29.16). St Augustine seems to add his vote in support of the doctrine: “As for temporal pain, some endure it here and some hereafter, and some both here and there; yet all is past before the Last [or general] Judgment” (*City of God*, 21.13).

As you’ll have noticed from these various quotations, one of the basic aims of the doctrine of purgatory is to help account for the fact that people die in very different states of readiness for Heaven. Though all Christians have been justified through their acceptance of Christ’s saving work, it’s obvious that not all, in fact very few, have been completely sanctified or perfected, and from the Roman Catholic standpoint only these very few have the right to proceed at death directly to Heaven. These are the saints, and it’s only they who are fully prepared for the splendors of God’s Kingdom. It’s not that God is too dainty or fastidious to tolerate the less than perfect. The point of the doctrine isn’t to protect Him from being soiled by His contact with men. The point is that anyone less worthy than a saint is going to be too weak and insubstantial to withstand the full presence of God. Most of us are going to require further strengthening, and this is essentially the whole purpose of purgatory. It’s an opportunity for the already faithful man or woman to grow in Christ, and for their basic love of God to penetrate the still resistant parts of their selves, in preparation for a direct meeting with God. Purgatory is definitely not, however—as is sometimes thought by non-Catholics—a second chance for those who die unrepentant, nor should it be looked on as an excuse for self-indulgence or procrastination. From the traditional Catholic point of view, it would be extremely foolish for anyone to put off until purgatory what might be accomplished in the here and now through an earthly life of self-discipline and prayer. All the traditional accounts make it clear that purgatory won’t be much fun! I’ll leave it to the Ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to make my point: “I am thy father’s spirit,” he says to the Prince, “doomed for a certain term to walk the night / And for the day confined to fast in fires / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid / To tell the secrets of my prison house / I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood.” The Ghost goes on to speak of having been sent “to

my account / With all my imperfections on my head. / O horrible, O horrible, most horrible!” (Act I, Scene 5). This is what purgatory is like. Just imagine what hell must be!

I’ve already mentioned that most Protestants reject the idea of purgatory. Orthodox Christians are also reluctant to go as far as Roman Catholics, at least in any official or dogmatic way. The Orthodox Church does teach that there’s some kind of intermediate state after death in which spiritual testing and purification take place, but the exact nature or conditions of the state are seldom specified. Some Orthodox authorities, in an effort to describe what will happen when we die, and basing themselves on the lives of certain saints, speak of a series of post-mortem checkpoints, corresponding to various kinds of sin, where angels and demons contest for human souls as they journey toward God, the angels helping and the demons tempting them. These checkpoints are often referred to as the “toll-houses”. This is not a view held by all Orthodox, however, and even those who favor the imagery caution that it’s not to be taken literally. As we’ve noticed in the case of several other doctrines this term, Orthodoxy tends to be somewhat less inclined than Catholicism to dot all the i’s and cross all the t’s, “respecting the need for silence” (Ware, 134). On the other hand, Orthodox certainly agree with Catholics in the emphasis they place on praying for the souls of the dead. In fact, some Orthodox saints have taken the further step of saying that the prayers of the righteous can help to free souls even from hell. (We’ll return to the question of whether this might be possible, and hence whether hell is permanent, next time.) Citing 2 Maccabees 12:46, “It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins”, this practice is encouraged in both churches with the understanding that such prayers can comfort and strengthen the departed. In this respect the Christian East and Catholic West concur: spiritual development and growth may continue after death, and this growth, supported by all the “organs” in the Body of Christ—whether those of us who are still alive in this world, or the saints who are now living in Heaven—is closely linked to a person’s ultimate destiny.

## Lecture 23: Universal Salvation?

I come to my concluding lecture on eschatology, and in fact to my concluding lecture of the course as a whole. As I do so, I feel obliged to point out that even though this is my final lecture, it's by no means the last word on systematic theology. What I've said in these pages is only the very tip of the iceberg, and for anyone who feels inspired to become a theologian I can guarantee you that there's much, much more to learn.

Last time I called your attention to traditional Christian views of life after death, and we looked specifically at the possible destinations to which a person might go when he dies. I talked first about the two destinations all Christians agree on, namely, Heaven and hell, and I emphasized that these should be thought of not so much as places but as spiritual states. While traditional Christian symbolism (beginning with the Bible itself) often pictures Heaven and hell as having physical properties and as if they had specific locations, these images are not to be taken literally. For in fact—as Peter Kreeft suggested—Heaven and hell are actually in the same “place”, and what they refer to essentially are opposite responses or attitudes toward the objective Reality of God's infinite Presence. This implies (as I noted) that Heaven and hell actually begin here on earth: they're not only *post-*, but *pre-*, mortem possibilities.

I then turned to the Roman Catholic understanding of life after death. Of all Christian groups, the Catholic Church has the most elaborate conception of where a man might go when he dies. In addition to Heaven and hell, say traditional Catholics like St Thomas Aquinas, there are also two limbos. The first, called the *limbus patrum*, was the state of existence into which the righteous dead entered who lived before Christ. This state is now empty, however, and no one will ever go there again. The second limbo, the *limbus infantum*, is where people who are personally sinless but who've never been baptized are sent, and of course this means mainly babies or infants. Finally, say Catholics, besides Heaven, hell, and the two limbos, there's also a fifth after-death state, called purgatory. This is where Christians who aren't yet saints must go in order to be corrected and purified before they're ready for Heaven.

Now as we discussed last time, not all Christians agree about these various possibilities. Protestants typically reject everything except Heaven and hell, and as I mentioned, not even all Catholics follow St Thomas in accepting the idea of the limbos. As for the Orthodox, they acknowledge the existence of some kind of intermediate state after death, something which (like the limbos) is on the boundary between Heaven and hell and which (like purgatory) is intended to test and purify the souls that pass through it. But as with many such teachings, the Orthodox Church has never insisted on turning this view into a formal dogma. When one compares these three major forms of Christianity on the subject of eschatology, one thus finds significant differences.

Nevertheless, in spite of these differences and disagreements, there's one point on which most Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox do agree. The great majority believe that when the good people finally do get to Heaven, they stay there forever. How one goes to Heaven is disputed, some saying it happens directly for all those who are saved and others saying it may be indirect in some cases, whether by means of purgatory or the *limbus patrum*. But either way, most theologians will tell you that once you're in Heaven, you stay there. Once a sheep, always a sheep. Similarly, most Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox are agreed that when the bad people go to hell, they too are going to stay there forever. The damned may have proceeded directly to hell, or maybe (if they lived before Christ) they will have spent some time first in the "bad" half of *sheol* or *hades*. But either way, most traditional Christians believe that once you're in hell, you stay there forever. Once a goat, always a goat.

As it turns out, however—and as I hinted last time—even on this point there's an important difference of opinion. No Christian (or at least none that I know of) has ever been troubled by the suggestion that the saved will stay put and remain in Heaven forever. But when it comes to hell, and to the question of whether it too is a permanent state, there's been a significant number of Christian authorities in history who've said that it's not everlasting, or in any case that it's not necessarily so. For these theologians, hell is to be understood as itself a kind of purgatory, a temporary place of purification, a place from which it's possible to escape in the end. We call these theologians *universalists*, since they believe that the possibility of salvation is open to everyone universally, without exception. Even the wickedest of men, and even the most horrendous

of demons—even Satan himself—may eventually be saved, they say. For a number of reasons I can't go into right now, many universalists have also entertained the idea of the pre-existence of souls. They believe that at the beginning of time, long before we came into this world, we existed in union with God. Ware, as you may remember, hinted at this idea back in his chapter on creation: "In God's heart and in His love, each one of us has always existed" (45). That being so, a significant number of universalists describe the eventual salvation of all creatures as an *apokatastasis*, a Greek term meaning a return to one's starting-point. The idea is that just as everything flowed forth from God to begin with, so everything will be drawn back to Him at the end. Three prepositions in St Paul's letter to the Romans are often stressed in defense of this idea: "*From Him and through Him and to Him are all things*" (Rom. 11:36). You don't have to believe in the *apokatastasis* to be a universalist, but the ideas are often found in tandem.

As you'll have noticed, I trust, the Church father Origen was a universalist. He also taught a doctrine of *apokatastasis*, a teaching which was condemned by a later church synod. The synod in question was called in 543 A.D. by the emperor Justinian, who was adamantly opposed to anything that, to him, smacked of pre-Christian philosophy, and he was apparently quick to seize on the idea of the *apokatastasis* as a prime example of paganism. Justinian went so far as to publish a formal statement criticizing what he understood to be Origen's teachings. The criticism most pertinent to our discussion at the moment reads as follows: "If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary, and will one day have an end, and that a restoration [*apokatastasis*] will take place of demons and impious men, let him be anathema." Now it obviously wouldn't make much difference to us that a sixth century emperor took issue with a third century theologian were it not for the fact that ten years later, in 553 A.D., Justinian's criticisms of Origen were brought forward for formal approval at the fifth Ecumenical Council, yet another of those major gatherings that took place in the early Church. To this day scholars debate as to whether this council approved these criticisms or not, and if so whether what they agreed to condemn was really what Origen himself had taught. We can't even begin to go into that contentious subject here. I wanted to bring it up, though, because a certain cloud of suspicion has ever since hovered around the name of Origen, and owing in part to its associations with his name a similar

cloud of suspicion has tended to hover around the universalist perspective, even though several saints, including Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximos the Confessor, have espoused at least a certain kind of universalism without being condemned for it.

I don't claim to be an expert, but I've given a fair amount of thought to this matter, and it appears to me that what in fact was condemned by the Fifth Council (if anything) were two ideas: first, that all of God's creatures are necessarily or automatically going to be saved, and second, that the *apokatastasis* is simply a return to the *status quo*, to the way things were to begin with in Eden. Given what I've read of his work, I myself doubt that Origen held either position, but that's a question for historical, not systematic, theology. For systematics the only real issue is what the Christian Tradition permits, and what it forbids, us to say on this matter. And as far as I can tell, the only thing the Tradition completely rejects is a brand of universalism that would deny either man's free will or the importance of time and history. If we say that every creature must be saved—that salvation is inevitable or necessary—we end up denying the importance of human choices, and we therefore run into the same problems that were pointed out in discussing the predestinarian standpoint. On the other hand, if we claim that the end of all things will be exactly like the beginning, we end up denying the importance of everything else in between. Whatever you might do, wherever you might go, whatever might happen: nothing is really lost, and nothing is gained. Your own personal life, the whole history of man, time itself, the planet, the galaxy, the universe: none of it really makes any difference, because everything's going back to the state that it was in to begin with. And this, too, Christianity—with impeccable logic—rejects.

But having said that, it's important to realize that there's another kind of universalism and another kind of *apokatastasis*, which do not seem to be subject to these objections. It's possible to be a universalist without insisting on the necessity of salvation, and it's possible to accept the *apokatastasis* without supposing that creatures return to God in quite the same state as they left Him—but with the conviction instead that men and women may drawn back into God with a maturity and discernment they did not have before and with an understanding of God deepened and enriched by their experience. In certain formulations, universalism simply means that there's no limit to the

mercy of God, and no statute of limitations (as it were) on repentance. It's forever possible, according to this perspective, for fallen angels and men to acknowledge their sins and repent and to begin working with God toward perfection. This is the position, for example, of a twentieth century Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-88). In a book called *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?*, von Balthasar carefully examines all the relevant Biblical texts on this point, and he concludes that the Scriptures give neither the assurance that all will necessarily be saved nor the assurance that anyone will be finally damned. Rather (he says) the Bible requires that the Christian take a kind of middle position: a position of *hope* that all *may* be saved.

As you've noticed if you've been reading carefully, this is essentially the position taken by Kallistos Ware. He, too, is a kind of universalist. He's not explicit about it in the Epilogue, but between the lines you get some glimpses of what he thinks on this subject. He poses the question, for example, "How can a God of love accept that even a single one of the creatures whom He has made should remain forever in hell?" (135). He answers this question by appealing (as he has before) to two facts: human freedom and Divine love. On the one hand, he insists—in words he borrows from none other than our friend C. S. Lewis—that "the doors of hell are locked *on the inside*" (135). In other words, the damned are only damned from their own point of view: it's they (and not God) who keep themselves shut up in hell. On the other hand, Ware stresses the infinitude of God's compassion. "Divine love is everywhere, and rejects no one," he says (136). So that "*if* there are any who remain eternally in hell"—notice the word *if*—"in some sense God is also there with them" (135-36). This is all a little cryptic and veiled, I realize, but if you think back to his chapter on "God as Creator", you may recall that Ware's brand of universalism was very evident there. We simply don't know, he said, "what plans God has for a possible reconciliation within the noetic realm, or how (if at all) the devil may eventually be redeemed" (57). And he goes on, "For us, at this present stage in our earthly existence, Satan is the enemy; but Satan has also a direct relationship with God, of which we know nothing at all and about which it is not wise for us to speculate. Let us mind our own business" (57-58).

I mentioned in my last lecture some of the Biblical texts that seem to support a doctrine of eternal damnation, notably Matthew 25. On their side, universalists counter

by pointing to a few passages of their own. Two verses are cited with particular frequency: Roman 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:28. In the first of these passages, St Paul writes, “As one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.” The two men of whom St Paul is speaking are Adam and Christ, and what he seems to be telling us is that the effects of their actions, though opposite, were quantitatively equal. What Adam did affected the whole human race for the worse, and similarly what Christ did will affect the whole human race for the better. And please notice that it’s not just that everyone is given *life* through Christ; you could interpret that word to mean simply that everyone will participate in the general resurrection. But no, everyone (says Paul) is “acquitted” by Christ, which suggests that, in their new life, all will be restored to a right relation with God. The other passage, 1 Corinthians 15:28, also comes from St Paul. Here he writes: “When all things are subjected to [Christ], then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under Him [in other words, God the Father], that God may be all in all.” That last phrase in Greek is *panta en pasin*, sometimes translated as “everything to everyone”. God (says Paul) will be all in all and everything to everyone. Well, asks the universalist, isn’t this the same thing as saying that all will be saved? If God is not just *in* “all” but *entirely* in them, and if He’s going to become for them *everything*, it makes no sense to suppose that anyone could still be in hell.

These two texts are hardly decisive, I realize, and (even if they were) we’ve discovered more than once this semester that there’s almost always at least one Biblical verse to be quoted in support of virtually any perspective. So in the interest of better understanding the universalist viewpoint, I suggest we try coming at the matter in a somewhat different way. Admitting (as we have before) that eschatology demands circumspection and silence and that a variety of possibilities seem to be allowed for in Scripture, let’s back up just a bit and ask ourselves what exactly our options are. When it comes to the question of whether all may be saved, what are the points of view we need to consider, and what alternatives do we have in putting them together?

I suggest that the traditional Christian is obliged to make sense of three basic claims, each of which can be supported by Scripture:

1. God wants to save *all* people: “The Lord does not wish that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

2. God has the *power* to achieve whatever He wants: “I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2).

3. Some people will be *eternally* punished in hell: “Those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus ... shall suffer the punishment of eternal [*aiônion*] destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

But now please notice this. Even though all three of these propositions find support in the Scriptures, it’s very difficult to see how they could all be simultaneously true. If 1 and 2 are true, it seems that 3 must be false. If 2 and 3 are true, it seems that 1 must be false. And if 1 and 3 are true, it seems that 2 must be false. We’re therefore forced to conclude either that the Bible is wrong on at least one of these fundamental points, or that at least one of these teachings must mean something that’s not immediately obvious. Well clearly, no traditional Christian is going to say the Bible is wrong. The inerrantist certainly won’t, and even (what we’ve called) the “traditionalist” interpreter, who admits that the Bible was written by men and that it may therefore contain certain empirical and historical errors, will not wish to reject doctrinal teachings that are so fundamental, and so well attested to, throughout the Scriptures. So what Christians have usually done instead is to try to reconcile the three claims by emphasizing two of them and then reinterpreting the remaining one in such a way as to smooth out the seeming contradiction. And this reinterpretation has usually consisted in a rethinking of the words that I italicized above: *all*, *power*, and *eternally*. To be more precise:

1. One possibility is to put the stress on the second and third propositions, that is, on God’s power and on the everlastingness of hell, and then to explain the first proposition by reinterpreting the word *all* to mean “*some* individuals from *all* groups of people”. This was John Calvin’s solution, and it gave rise to the Calvinist notion (discussed in Lecture 18) of limited atonement. What the first proposition really means from this standpoint is that God wishes to save all *kinds* or *categories* of people, but within those various groups there will be some who aren’t saved—indeed most won’t be saved—and these are precisely those who will spend eternity in hell. God can save

whomever He wishes, but according to Calvinists there are some, for reasons known only to Himself, He doesn't wish to save.

2. A second way of resolving the conflict is to stress the first and third propositions. Christians who use this strategy believe that God wishes to save everyone, but they also maintain that some will be eternally damned. In order to reconcile these claims, they're obliged to reinterpret the second proposition by saying that God's *power* is limited or curtailed by human freedom. God can do whatever He chooses, but what He chooses above all is to respect the choices of His creatures. It's true (*contra* Calvinism) that He wants to save everyone, but He wants even more to respect their freedom, and in order to do this His own saving purpose for some men and women must go unfulfilled. This more or less Pelagian or semi-Pelagian perspective is fairly common in the popular Christian press, but most theologians have shied away from this method of resolving the issue because of the way it undermines the Divine absoluteness and infinity. God is no longer an illimitable, ineffable Mystery. He's instead a sort of cosmic diplomat or negotiator, doing His best to cut His losses and to produce the best balance of good over evil He can.

3. Finally, there's a third way of resolving the issue. This involves stressing the first and second propositions—insisting that God wishes to save everyone *and* that He has the power to succeed in this aim—and then explaining how the third proposition could also be true by focusing on the adverb *eternally*. The Calvinist would have us reinterpret the meaning of *all*, while lay Pelagians propose that we reconsider the meaning of *power*. But what if you don't want to be a predestinarian, and what if you can't take seriously a God who can't fulfill His own aims? It seems the only option that's left is to look more closely at the significance of the phrase “eternal punishment”, and this is precisely what the universalist does.

When we read in our English translations of the Bible—and virtually all of them seem to use the same language—that hell is “eternal” or “everlasting”, it's only natural to come away thinking that the punishment of the damned must have no end, for after all (one assumes) something eternal or everlasting is going to last forever. Isn't that the very meaning of these words? It may indeed be their meaning in English, but universalism has

a strong defense in the fact that the Greek word in the relevant verses of Scripture can, and often does, mean something very different.

In the passage from 2 Thessalonians that I quoted above, the word *eternal* in the phrase “eternal destruction” is a translation of the Greek *aiônion*. The same term appears in Matthew 18:8, Matthew 25:41, Matthew 25:46, and Hebrews 6:2, where we’re told of those who will be cast into “eternal [or everlasting] fire” and who will undergo “eternal [or everlasting] judgment”.

*Aiônion* is an adjective derived from the Greek noun *aiôn*, a word that means fundamentally a period of time or age. In the earliest Greek authors like Homer and Hesiod, it meant a life or lifetime, as in an individual’s span of years. The word soon came to refer by extension to a somewhat longer, but still definite, period of time, roughly the same as “generation” in English, and then later to a longer time still, to a period, era, or age, as in “the Medieval period” or “the modern age”. This last sense comes directly into English when *aiôn* is transliterated into Roman letters. An *aeon*, or (as it is more often spelled today) an *eon*, is any long, indefinite period of time. So when we say that something happened eons ago, we mean that it happened a very, very long time ago.

Now when we look at the adjectival form of the word, *aiônion*, we find something rather curious. In most of the classical authors of ancient Greece, Plato for example, we discover that the adjective means just what we’d expect, given the definition of the cognate noun. It’s a word that’s ordinarily used to describe something that persists or remains in duration for a very long time, throughout the extent of a particular age, and ending when the age itself ends. But as early as the third century B.C., and certainly by New Testament times, in addition to having this earlier limited sense, *aiônion* had come to be employed as well to describe things whose duration was so long, so extended, as to be indefinable and virtually infinite—things, in other words, to which we might correctly apply the English words *eternal* or *everlasting*. The term is used in this sense, for example, in Romans 16:26, where St Paul speaks about “the command of the eternal God”—the command of the *aióniou Theou* in Greek. And yet at the same time we also find instances in the New Testament where the word continues to be used in the older sense to mean simply “age-long” or “long-lasting”. One therefore has to decide from the

Biblical context, depending on the noun that the adjective modifies, which sense is intended. Interestingly enough, *aiônion* obviously has the older, limited meaning in the verse immediately before the one I just quoted from Paul. In Romans 16:25, St Paul speaks of the “mystery” of the gospel, which was kept secret (he says) “for long ages, but is now disclosed”. The phrase “long ages” in this verse is an English translation of the Greek phrase *chronois aiôniois*, which literally means “the long-lasting times”. It’s obvious that Paul doesn’t mean for us to think of these times or ages as *eternal*, for if they were eternal, they would have had no end, and the gospel of which Paul is speaking would have never been disclosed.

The point of this lesson in Greek semantics is simply this. Not every Biblical use of the word *aiônion* can be taken as proof that the thing thus described is unending. There’s no denying the fact that the punishments of hell are described as *aiônion* in the New Testament. But this doesn’t necessarily mean that hell is therefore eternal as we use and understand that term in English today. An “aeonic” hell, to coin a word, may simply be a hell that continues as long as *time* continues, and thus unto the very end of the ages. Or perhaps one could even reverse the proposition and say instead that as long as one continues in time—as long as one continues to be distracted by the flux of this fallen world, by the *prelest* of a fallen consciousness—one continues in hell. And if that’s so, then perhaps the ultimate cessation of this flux through *nepsis* or sleepless attention to God, whether here or hereafter, will mean an end to hell and a transformative entrance into the true eternity of the Divine Mystery. Or so, at least, the universalist believes we may hope.

I need to wrap things up, but this should give you at least a glimpse of the reasons for the universalist view of the afterlife. As I conclude, however, I need to repeat something very important—namely, my earlier warning that, if there is in fact a legitimate Christian form of universalism, it doesn’t mean we all have free tickets to Heaven. Quite the contrary, the Tradition insists that man’s salvation, if and when it comes, will always cost something. Justification is indeed a free gift, which can simply be accepted by faith. But sanctification or perfection is not the same, not simply something that’s given. And this in turn means that the fullness of salvation is never a passive affair, but must always be worked for (as St Paul says) “with fear and trembling”

(Phil. 2:12). Hence, even if the universalists are right that in principle all men and women (and maybe even demons) may be saved, this in itself is no proof that in fact they all will be saved. For before anyone can enter Heaven he's going to have to give himself up and give in to God, and there's every reason to think that this act, never easy, will only get harder the longer it's postponed. (Pay close attention to what Lewis says about "self-giving" in the Reader on p. 210, and take a look sometime at his wonderful book *The Great Divorce*. For those who would like to study this question further, I strongly recommend *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, by Ilaria Ramelli [2013].)

Here it seems is as good a point as any to end a course in Christian systematic theology: on a note of hope, but at the same time tempered with admonition, as if in reflection (one final time) of the two poles of a divine Mystery that is at once just and merciful.

FINIS ET INITIUM