

“AND IF THEY FALL AS LUCIFER  
FELL”: ON THE LURE OF  
ANARCHY

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“The creature does not need to deny his own  
creatureliness in order to satisfy his desire  
for divine glory.”



How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star [= Lucifer],  
son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you  
who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, “I will  
ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my  
throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the  
far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I  
will make myself like the Most High.” But you are brought  
down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit.

—Is 14:12–15<sup>1</sup>

Like pantheism from the cosmological perspective, anarchy  
from the anthropological perspective is one of the great  
and fascinating temptations of human thought. Indeed,  
in my opinion, only two types of men entirely preserve

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1. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotations are from the RSV-CE2  
(Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, 2nd ed.)

the stature of the human being: the anarchist and the authentically religious person.

—Luigi Giussani

And this makes certain that the first proud being,  
Who was the paragon of every creature,  
By not awaiting light fell immature.

—Dante Alighieri<sup>2</sup>

This meditation proposes to uphold the thesis that only an adequate reflection on the metaphysical status of *poiesis* or creative art allows us to answer with sufficient depth and clarity one of the most unsettling but also fascinating questions that the *libido libertatis* (lust for freedom) characteristic of postmodern man poses (or poses with new intensity) to humanist and Christian thought: *Whence* comes this mysterious impulse toward anarchy (*hubris*) and toward the transgression of the existing order, which even the great wisdom of the Greeks noted without successfully explaining it and about which even the Christian tradition has still dared to say perhaps too little? Certainly, evil by its nature is *unintelligible*. It can be neither deduced nor explained. And nevertheless the question about the conditions for its possibility and its ultimate origins is posed and is posed today more than ever in all its radical character. Obviously the question here is not only, why did Eve eat the fruit? Eve was tempted. That is, she was confronted with an interpretation of reality different from the authentic one through Satan's lying words. The true and more radical question is, why did Lucifer rebel against God *in the first place*? What is the origin of the fascination that a created spirit may observe for the *deliberate* negation of the true and the good?

It must be admitted that the traditional answers to this extremely slippery question are rather generic. In the following discussion, I do not claim to offer definitive answers, but rather to formulate a hypothesis and to demonstrate its plausibility.

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2. *Paradiso*, Canto XIX, 46–48 (trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow). Subsequent citations refer to this translation.

## 1. THE FALL OF LUCIFER ACCORDING TO TOLKIEN

Of the Christian authors chronologically close to us, perhaps none meditates more profoundly on the problem under consideration than John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. The central insight of the great English novelist—an insight that he expressed in the mythical form of that wonderful cosmogenic myth that he entitled the *Ainulindalë*<sup>3</sup>—is that the answer must be sought in Lucifer’s desire to take as his own the prerogative that seems most appropriately to “define” God, namely the power to create or produce by means of *a pure act of one’s own will*, the power to give origin to “things of [one’s] own”—which take their origin from one’s own autonomous will.

And it came to pass that Ilúvatar called together all the Ainur and declared to them a mighty theme, unfolding to them things greater and more wonderful than he had yet revealed; and the glory of its beginning and the splendour of its end amazed the Ainur, so that they bowed before Ilúvatar and were silent.

Then Ilúvatar said to them: “Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. . . .”

But now Ilúvatar sat and hearkened, and for a great while

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3. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), 3–4. The importance of this idea for a global understanding of Tolkien’s thought and of his entire subcreative enterprise is enormous, and critics are still far from having studied the topic fully. In fact, Melkor can and in my opinion must be taken as the tragic antitype of what Tolkien himself shows by means of his work: a spiritual creature can “create,” and is in fact called to create, in an analogous yet real sense, a world “of his own,” “his own heaven and earth.” But the accomplishment of such a lofty mission is not opposed to one’s love for the primary world created by God; on the contrary, it requires and is proportional to this love. On this subject, see especially *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 144–47, 188, 194–95. On Tolkien’s understanding of the fall of Lucifer as a craving to be an “unoriginated initiator,” see Jonathan McIntosh, *The Flame Imperishable: Tolkien, St. Thomas, and the Metaphysics of Fairie* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2017). This note is inspired in part by the following (unpublished) works by Siobhán Maloney, whom I thank for having kindly allowed me to read them: “Light from an Invisible Lamp: The Sacramental Vocation of the Artist According to J. R. R. Tolkien” (STL thesis, John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, *pro manuscripto*); “Beyond the Circles of the World: Man and His Making in the Writings of J. R. R. Tolkien” (*pro manuscripto*).

it seemed good to him, for in the music there were no flaws. But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren. He had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his own. . . . Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar. But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren.

First of all it is important to understand the cause-and-effect connection between the wonder of the angels at the creative power manifested by Ilúvatar through the initial exposition of the first powerful theme and the desire that sprang up in Melkor's heart to conceive of *his own* thoughts. Paradoxically, this initial admiration is indeed what will drive Melkor to rebellion and finally to the desire to "alter" the music that proceeded from the mind of Ilúvatar. Lucifer paradoxically destroys what God creates<sup>4</sup> prompted by the desire to be an origin, to create in the same way in which God is origin and creates, that is, in the manner of a first principle (*fontalitas, principalitas*). Note the paradox: the devil does not destroy *in actu primo* (in the first act) in order to be a destroyer, but because he wants to be a creator—that is, powerful like God, or "in the manner of God." Indeed, since it was not granted to him to find the imperishable flame through which God creates from nothing (that is, starting from his own will alone), it seems to him that the only way to achieve his purpose is by destroying, or rather *distorting*, what exists so as to reshape it according to his own arbitrary will. In destroying, he is acutally moved by an exaggerated yearning to emulate God, to be *like* him. Have we thus solved the problem? Not at all. On the contrary, in a certain sense we have circled back to the point of departure. Where does this extravagance come from? Or, why can the spirit will something beyond the measure for which he is made? Every innocent being cannot help but aspire, precisely inasmuch as he

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4. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 10–11.

is still innocent, to what God has given to him by nature to desire. How then could the first movement of *hubris* be introduced into the created spirit?

For now, let us set aside Tolkien and his suggestive interpretation of the fall of the angels and begin by seeking insights in Thomas's question in the *Summa* dedicated to the problem at hand.

## 2. THE OPINION OF ST. THOMAS

Following the unanimous patristic tradition, which is based on a single but fundamental biblical text (Is 14:12–15), St. Thomas begins by assuming that Lucifer (the Day Star) sinned by desiring to be like God (*esse ut Deus*).

The long and important response to the question, whether the demon had *desired to be like God*, begins as follows:

Without doubt [*absque omni dubio*] the angel sinned by seeking to be as God [*peccavit appetendo esse ut Deus*]. But this can be understood in two ways: first, by [a true] equality [*per equiparantiam*]; secondly, by [some kind of] likeness [*per similitudinem*]. He could not seek to be as God in the first way; because by natural knowledge [*naturali cognitione*] he knew that this was impossible: and there was no habit preceding his first sinful act, nor any passion fettering his mind, so as to lead him to choose what was impossible by failing in some particular; as sometimes happens in ourselves. And even supposing it were possible, it would be against the natural desire; because there exists in everything the natural desire of preserving its own nature; which would not be preserved were it to be changed into another nature. Consequently, no creature of a lower order can ever covet the grade of a higher nature; just as an ass does not desire to be a horse: for were it to be so upraised, it would cease to be itself.<sup>5</sup>

As always, Thomas's argument is clear and rich. Attempting to outline his reasoning, we could paraphrase the content of the excerpt cited as follows: first, the desire to be

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5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 63, a. 3 co. (hereafter cited as *ST*).

like God is no doubt the motive of Lucifer's sin. Second, there are various kinds of likeness. Since the concept of likeness in fact implies by its nature partial difference and partial equality, it is obvious that one can desire to resemble God in *different respects and degrees*. Thomas calls *equiparantia* (literally: being made equal, equality) the type of likeness whereby two similar beings are equal in essence, and he rules out the possibility of Lucifer desiring to be like God (*esse ut Deus*) in this sense. In other words, we must exclude from the range of Lucifer's possible desires those perfections of God that qualify him in an essential way—just as in the case of every spiritual creature. Third, to speculate that Lucifer lucidly desired to possess one of these perfections—that is, that he desired to become *identical* to God purely and simply—would be not only to affirm that he desired to possess something that he knew he could not obtain, but also—and much more self-contradictorily—it would mean that he consciously desired what is *undesirable*, namely his own annulment. To desire to become like God, even in that which distinguishes him ontologically from creation, means *ipso facto* to desire the loss of one's own being, which Thomas maintains is impossible, if it is true that every being desires by nature *in actu primo* to preserve his own being.

In what, then, could the fall have consisted? A first possible answer is the following: in *the way in which* Lucifer wanted to obtain the good that he desired *licitly*. Aquinas continues a little later on:

To desire to be as God according to likeness [*per similitudinem*] can happen in two ways. In one way, as to that likeness whereby everything is made to be likened unto God. And so, if anyone desire in this way to be Godlike, he commits no sin; provided that he desires such likeness in proper order, that is to say, that he may obtain it of God [i.e., in dependence upon God]. But he would sin were he to desire to be like unto God even in the right way, as of his own [i.e., by himself], and not of [= by] God's power.<sup>6</sup>

According to this first hypothesis, Lucifer had sinned only with regard to the manner of obtaining those perfections

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6. *STI*, q. 63, a. 3 co.

that were lawful for him to desire (i.e., autonomously). Although Thomas considers this thesis not entirely erroneous,<sup>7</sup> he thinks that, if it is not correctly integrated, it is insufficient to explain Satan's rebellion. In fact, as soon as we ask what "the perfections in which Lucifer-Melkor was called to be like God" are against the background of Tolkien's version of the *mysterium iniquitatis* (the mystery of evil) and the *libido creativa* (the passion to create) that is characteristic of postmodern man, we easily notice several problems with this first hypothesis. Indeed, if Lucifer-Melkor had willingly obeyed God he would not have obtained at all the possibility of participating in that perfection for which he rebelled, the power to "create things *of his own*," his "heaven and earth," at least according to Tolkien. The drawback of this hypothesis thus comes to light: if Lucifer's sin consisted only in his manner of tending toward a licitly desired object, then we would need to say that God himself instilled in his creature a desire destined to be frustrated. The power to create and govern in the way in which God creates and governs is the thing that most radically and irreducibly distinguishes and even opposes God the Creator to creation. We will return to this crucial point later. For now, let us remain with Thomas.

He (implicitly) answers the objection just elucidated by formulating a second hypothesis, which he prefers:

In another [second] way one may desire to be like unto God in some respect which is not natural to one; as if one were to desire to create heaven and earth, which is proper to God; in which desire there would be sin. It was in this way that the devil desired to be as God. Not that he desired to resemble God by being subject to no one else absolutely; for [even] so he would be desiring his own "not-being"; since no creature can exist except by holding its existence under [i.e., in dependence upon] God.

Thus, according to Thomas, the sin of Lucifer-Melkor would not lie purely and simply in the method chosen to obtain a licitly desired perfection, but rather in the desire to possess one or more divine perfections that it was not *good* for him to desire, since they are perfections that belong exclusively to God.

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7. As we will see below, Thomas in fact identifies the first and the second hypothesis, so that they illuminate and complement each other.

At this point we find ourselves confronting a new problem: Had not Thomas suggested a little earlier that Lucifer could only desire goods that do not involve distortion of his nature and therefore self-dissolution? How can we explain then the fact that Lucifer had *de facto* coveted perfections that are God's exclusive prerogative? More precisely, *how* can he have desired goods that *his nature cannot receive*?

Aquinas answers this question first of all by staking out several negative points. First, as mentioned above, Lucifer did not desire to be equal to God, that is, similar to God in every respect (*equiparantia*).<sup>8</sup> Lucifer could not desire "to resemble God by being subject to no one else absolutely; for so he would be desiring his own 'not-being.'"<sup>9</sup> Indeed, he knew very well (by his natural knowledge: *naturali cognitione*) that "no creature can exist except by holding its existence under God."<sup>10</sup> Instead, according to Thomas, what he desired and must have deceived himself about being able to obtain is, (1) *in actu primo*, to acquire beatitude autonomously (i.e., without God's help)—in two possible senses, which Thomas carefully distinguishes below; and (2) *in actu secundo* (in the second act), to have preeminence and dominion (*aliquem principatum*) over other things, a result of a more original self-centeredness of the *ego*.

But he desired resemblance with God in this respect—by desiring, as his last end of beatitude, something which he could attain by the virtue of his own nature, turning

8. "Primo quidem modo, non potuit appetere esse ut Deus, quia scivit hoc esse impossibile, naturali cognitione. . . . Unde impossibile est quod Angelus inferior appetat esse aequalis superiori; nedum quod appetat esse *aequalis Deo*." (He could not seek to be as God in the first way; because by natural knowledge he knew that this was impossible. . . . Consequently it is impossible for one angel of lower degree to desire equality with a higher; and still more to covet equality *with God*) (*ST I*, q. 63, a. 3 co., emphasis added).

9. "Non ut ei assimilaretur quantum ad hoc quod est nulli subesse simpliciter: quia sic etiam suum non esse appeteret." (Not that he desired to resemble God by being subject to no one else absolutely; for so he would be desiring his own "not-being") (*ST I*, q. 63, a. 3 co.).

10. "Cum nulla creatura esse possit nisi per hoc quod sub Deo esse participat." (Since no creature can exist except by holding its existence under God) (*ST I*, q. 63, a. 3 co.). The philosophical Latin expression could also be translated: "Except by sharing in being under God."



his appetite away from supernatural beatitude, which is attained by God's grace. Or, if he desired as his last end that likeness of God which is bestowed by grace, he sought to have it by the power of his own nature [*per virtutem suae naturae*]; and not from Divine assistance according to God's ordering [*non ex divino auxilio secundum Dei dispositionem*]. This [solution] harmonizes with Anselm's opinion, who says [*De casu diaboli*, 4], that "[the devil] sought that to which he would have come had he stood fast." These two views in a manner coincide; because according to both, he sought to have final beatitude of his own power [*appetit finalem beatitudinem per suam virtutem habere*], whereas this is proper to God alone [*quod est proprium Dei*]. Since, then, what exists of itself [*quod est per se*] is the principle and cause of what exists of another [*est principium et causa eius quod est per aliud*], it follows from this [first desire of the devil] furthermore [the second, which is] that he sought to have dominion over others [*consecutum est quod appetit aliquem principatum super alia habere*]; wherein he also perversely wished to be like unto God.<sup>11</sup>

I will make three comments here. First, Thomas affirms beyond the shadow of a doubt that the essence of Lucifer's sin consists in his will to find in himself the source of his own happiness. In other words, the object of the act of will that transforms Lucifer ("Light-bearer") into Satan is the *egocentric* identification of himself with the greatest good (his own and consequently the good of others).<sup>12</sup> We should note here above all the fine mastery with which Thomas's solution succeeds in unifying the first and the second hypotheses that he had formulated previously, which allows him to align himself with the otherwise unacceptable position of Anselm. Indeed, to say that the good or the divine perfection illicitly desired by Lucifer is the power to obtain *by himself* the licitly desired good that is natural and/or supernatural beatitude, is in effect to spell out the sense in which the first hypothesis was in fact correct: Lucifer sins *both* in the sense that he desires to obtain a licit good in an

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11. *ST I*, q. 63, a. 3 co.

12. Here Thomas is especially in debt to Augustine, who returns rather insistently to the topic, which he normally explores by meditating on the meaning of John 8:44 (see below). He does this above all in his commentaries (see below). See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 11.13, 12.1, 14.3, 14.4, 14.13; *De Genesi ad litteram* 11.23, 30.

illicit manner (first hypothesis) *and* in the sense that he desires to obtain a good that is not lawful for him to desire (second hypothesis). The illicit good coincides with the ability *to give to himself* that which he does desire lawfully.

Second, the theme of the desire to be “creator” in the manner of God, which was cited as an example of a perfection belonging exclusively to God, does not seem to receive any more attention here. Thomas evidently maintains the secondary or rather derivative point: the *libido creandi* is only the epiphenomenon of a more radical and original derailment of the will that consists in the elevation of oneself to the supreme good, that is, to the source of one’s own and others’ happiness.

Third, the implicit but crucial premise that stands behind Thomas’s conclusion and makes it noncontradictory is that Lucifer can be mistaken about the nature of the perfections that he seeks to take as his own inasmuch as he does not see them as God’s essentially exclusive properties. Otherwise, Thomas would also have to exclude these hypotheses, which instead he approves, for the same reason he ruled out the possibility of Lucifer emancipating himself from the ontological dependence that binds him to the Creator. In other words, the condition for the possibility of Lucifer’s sin seems to lie for Thomas in the fact that he is sufficiently ignorant<sup>13</sup> as to be able to deceive himself that what is an exclusive, incommunicable perfection of the Creator is instead a perfection that he can take as his own *accidentally*, increasing his own glory without thereby ceasing to be himself.

In fact, it is possible, and in my opinion necessary, to interpret in this sense as well the important central section of the response in *ST I*, q. 63, a. 3, which I deliberately refrained from citing until now. In it, we find the keystone of Aquinas’s entire argument:

Consequently, no creature of a lower order can ever covet the grade of a higher nature. . . . But herein the imagination plays us false [*Sed in hoc imaginatio decipitur*]; for one is liable to think that, because a man seeks to occupy a higher grade as to accidentals [*quantum ad aliqua accidentalialia*],

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13. On the limits of the natural knowledge of the angels and in particular on the angelic knowledge with respect to the divine essence, see *ST I*, q. 56, a. 3.

which can increase without the destruction of the subject [*absque corruptione subiecti*], he can also seek a higher grade of nature [*altiozem gradum naturae*], to which he could not attain without ceasing to exist. Now it is quite evident that God surpasses the angels, not merely in accidentals, but also in degree of nature; and one angel [surpasses] another [in the same way]. Consequently it is impossible for one angel of lower degree to desire equality with a higher; and still more to covet equality with God.

There is no doubt that Thomas writes these lines first of all as confirmation for the first statement in his response, that is, to corroborate the idea that Lucifer cannot have desired to be like God *per equiparantiam* (equality of nature). Whereas man, Thomas reasons, *can* confuse what would be a change of his nature with the acquisition of accidental perfections that do not corrupt its glory but increase it. This possibility apparently cannot exist in the relation between Lucifer and God, if it is true that in the former “there was no habit preceding his first sinful act, nor any passion fettering his mind [*ligans cognoscitivam ipsius virtutem*], so as to lead him to choose what was impossible by failing in some particular [*ut in particulari deficiens eligeret impossibile*]; as sometimes happens in ourselves [i.e., in us, human beings]” (*ST I*, q. 63, a. 3 co., emphasis added).

Nevertheless, it is at least debatable that Thomas here is arguing this alone. Indeed, as soon as the reader connects this important central section of the response to what follows rather than to what precedes, he discovers that the theme of deceptive imagination (*sed in hoc imaginatio decipitur*) provides in reality an indispensable analogical key with which to make clear the coherence of Aquinas’s reasoning.

Certainly Thomas, as was emphasized above, intends to say here first of all that Lucifer cannot desire to put on perfections that he knows by his natural knowledge to be exclusive essential properties of God (e.g., being the creator of himself). On the other hand, this does not mean that he cannot be wrong *absolutely*. As we have seen, the course of Thomas’s reasoning presupposes exactly the contrary. Indeed, Aquinas would be contradicting himself (which is difficult to imagine) if, in affirming that Lucifer desired “to be like unto God in some respect which is not natural to one” (*quantum ad hoc in quo non natus est assimilari*)

(ST I, q. 63, a. 3 co.), he did not presuppose that Lucifer *de facto* was wrong in an *analogous* sense to the way in which human beings are wrong, as mentioned in the last passage cited.

To sum up, Thomas seems to be saying that if Lucifer was able to fall in love with a good that he was not born to possess (*non natus est assimilari*), this is because he was able to deceive himself, as though he could arrogate to himself, accidentally, perfections that belong essentially to the divine nature: being the source of one's own and others' beatitude. If we have understood it correctly, Thomas's solution is marvelously balanced. Nevertheless, this leaves one very important, inescapable question. Let us see why.

The Angelic Doctor seems to assume that Lucifer's sin consists essentially in an *exaggerated* or *excessive craving* for likeness with God. In other words, Lucifer wanted "too much"—where the meaning of "too much" would consist in emulating God's *perfect autonomy*. Aquinas for his part succeeds in explaining how this is possible. But he does not succeed in clarifying *how* this could happen *concretely*. In other words, speaking generically about beatitude (whether natural or supernatural happiness), Thomas does not clarify the image of beatitude that must have been formed in Lucifer's mind, nor does he state what concrete thing it could have consisted in, making his self-deception *possible* in the first place. He explains, as we saw, that Lucifer could not deceive himself to think that he could attain absolute autonomy. Moreover, he goes so far as to specify that this must have been a *relative autonomy* that at the same time exceeded the limits of what was granted to him as a creature. But he does not pursue the point beyond that.

This is where Tolkien's intuition proves to be extraordinarily perspicacious.<sup>14</sup> Let us turn to the story of *Ainulindalë*. According to Tolkien, what arises *in actu primo* in the mind of Lucifer-Melkor, as well as in that of every other angelic creature, is amazement, wonder at the splendor of the theme (themes) that came from the mind of Ilúvatar. What arises even in Lucifer *in*

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14. Thomas himself seems to set out on a similar path when he offers the ability to create heaven and earth as an example of an illicitly desired perfection. In the last part of the response, however, he no longer seems to give any central weight to this theme, as was illustrated above.

*principio*, to translate the idea into biblical language, is amazement at the splendor of God's glory—a glory that must have been manifested to the angels in the form of an infinitely abundant creative power. Tolkien suggests that the fallen angel became enamored of this glory. This is the glory with which he desired to be “clothed.” This is the form assumed in his imagination (*imaginatio*) by the likeness to God that he desired by nature.

As soon as this hypothesis is taken as valid, anyone can see that, far from solving all the knotty problems, it gives rise to a new problem. Is it really fair, then, to blame the rebel angel? If that very power in which God's glory shines supremely cannot be attained, is this promised *similitudo* (likeness, according to Thomas), whatever it may be, not a rather *poor* thing?

Some will say, again following Aquinas, that the wonder of the Ainur—a wonder that as such involves fascination and delight—is in itself testimony to the fact that God intended to grant the angels some participation in his creative power, to each according to his own analogy, as the Areopagite put it.<sup>15</sup> Otherwise Lucifer would not even have been able to conceive the desire to “create things of his own.” This is certainly true. And nevertheless it remains true that the creature can “create” only derivatively—that is, by *receiving* from the one Lord the power to help him give full actuality to a work which *in actu primo* is his and his alone. Indeed, not only does the artist give shape to material that, however formless it may be, was created not by her but by God, but even the ideas that germinate in her mind exist in reality already from the beginning in the infinite mind of God. Hence the unsettling question: assuming (and not granting)<sup>16</sup> that to create means to communicate being to an entity different from oneself on one's own initiative and by oneself alone, it cannot be denied that the opposition between God and every one of his creatures is *in this respect* such as to frustrate any possibility of a true analogy (a real likeness

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15. On the teaching about analogy in Dionysius the Areopagite, see Vladimir Lossky, “La notion des ‘Analogies’ chez Denys le Pseudo-Aréopagite,” *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 5 (1931): 279–309.

16. As will be seen below, the hypothesis that Lucifer's mind had given credence to this (presumptuous and therefore culpable) equation allows us to shed a decisive light on the mystery with which we are dealing.

in the infinite difference: Fourth Lateran Council). In fact, in the universe that we know—and note that it is not clear how it could be otherwise<sup>17</sup>—the creature can always only be a helper, a supporter (*gregario*), but not the first principle of anything. But then is not poor Melkor/Morgoth right to feel that his desire for free creativity is frustrated? Is he not basically right to feel that his “wings have been clipped”?

As Luigi Giussani had reason to observe in his day, one cannot help but acknowledge that “anarchy is one of the greatest and most fascinating temptations of human thought”<sup>18</sup> (and perhaps of angelic thought as well).

### 3. INSIGHTS FROM THE FOURTH CENTURY: FROM THE FALL OF LUCIFER TO THE FALL OF EUNOMIUS

In any attempt to confront this new and difficult question, it is decisively important to reflect on a curious verbal coincidence, which I believe deserves the utmost attention: the Greek adjective *anarchos* (“without principle,” where the etymological connection with the noun “anarchy” is quite obvious) starts to acquire considerable weight in theology in the context of the dogmatic controversy that saw the three Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa)<sup>19</sup> opposed

17. It would be possible, for example, to imagine a universe in which a spiritual creature possesses the power to bring into existence *ex nihilo subiecti* (from the nothingness of the subject) the material cause of his own artifacts. Even if this were possible, it would not diminish one bit both the primary passivity of the creature’s creative action and also the impossibility of the creature ever conceiving an idea that did not preexist in the mind of God.

18. Luigi Giussani, *Il senso religioso* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010), 12. For an English translation, see *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997).

19. As is well known, Gregory of Nazianzus repeatedly uses the adjective *anarchos* to designate the distinctive character of the Father’s hypostasis with respect to that of the Son or the Holy Spirit. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes* 29.3, 30.19, 42.15, etc., in *Tutte le Orazioni*, ed. Claudio Moreschini (Milan: Bompiani, 2000), 726–27, 740–41 (In English: NPNF–2 [= *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series] 7:301b–316b, 390b). See also Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius* 1.15, 2.17 (PG [= *Patres Graeci* (ed., Migne)] 29, 545B, and 608C), etc. For a precise map of the various meanings acquired

to Eunomius—the most formidable of the Arian theologians of the final generation.<sup>20</sup>

Drastically summarized, Eunomius had tried to express reasonably and rigorously the Arian thesis of the nondivinity of the Son by way of a syllogism: being unoriginated (*agennesía*) belongs essentially to the very notion of God. To be God, in other words, means to be without principle (*agenetos* or *anarchos*, as Nazianzen would put it). But the Son, precisely as Son, is born of the Father. Ergo, the Son cannot be God. Given the importance of Eunomius's argument for the development of our topic, it is worth citing at least one passage from the only text by Eunomius that has come down to us, the *Apology*:

We professed our belief in one God, according to the natural idea and at the same time according to the teaching of the Fathers. He was produced neither by himself nor by others, because each of these two hypotheses is equally impossible, since, in truth, the producer must preexist the product and the product must be later with respect to the producer. It is impossible for a thing to be prior or subsequent to itself, and nothing can be prior to God. . . .

Well, then, if God is that which nothing preexists and before which nothing can be placed, because he is before everything, then being unoriginated is correlative [*akolythei*] to him. Or better, he himself is an unoriginated substance [*ousía agennetos*].<sup>21</sup>

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by the adjective *anarchos* in patristic writings, see G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 119.

20. On this subject Claudio Moreschini writes, “Although on the practical level Eunomius was not a serious danger for the Church, on the theoretical level, in contrast, he appeared as one of the most formidable and militant adversaries of orthodoxy and of the teaching of Nicaea. . . . It is no accident that Basil's trinitarian doctrine was presented for the first time in his *Against Eunomius* and that fifteen years later his brother Gregory of Nyssa did the same in his work by the same title, a few years after starting his career as a Christian writer; before dedicating himself to the polemic with the heretic, he had written works mainly on spirituality and biblical exegesis. . . . The anti-Eunomian polemic would be the central point of his [Nyssa's] trinitarian speculation” (Gregory of Nyssa, introduction to *Opere Dogmatiche*, ed. Claudio Moreschini [Milan: Bompiani, 2014], 135–36).

21. *Apology* 7 (SC [= *Sources Chrétiennes*] 305, 244–46). An excellent introduction to the *Apology* of Eunomius is the essay by Bernard Sesboüé, “Introduction à l'apologie d'Eunome” in the same volume (SC 305, 179–97).

To say that God is unoriginated means for Eunomius to grasp an essential attribute of God as God, because “the negation of the possibility of being generated does not indicate here a privation but on the contrary a perfection.”<sup>22</sup> Hence the necessary conclusion that God cannot generate a Son who is consubstantial with him (*homoousios*: Nicaea), since that would imply a contradiction: the Son cannot be simultaneously generated and not generated in the same respect.

For Basil and the two Gregorys, the syllogism is erroneous because it is based on a premise (the first) that is false, or rather not proved and indemonstrable. The fact that we are unacquainted with a generation that is atemporal, eternal, infinite, does not mean that it is metaphysically impossible or contradictory.<sup>23</sup> The rationalistic identification

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22. *Ibid.*, 8, 246–47.

23. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 29, 5–6 (*Tutte le Orazioni*, 730–35 [NPNF–2 7:302a–303a]). This is not the place for a careful account of the various and elaborate arguments deployed by the Cappadocian Fathers to demolish Eunomius’s position; on this subject, see especially the voluminous works *Contra Eunomium* written by Basil and his brother Gregory (cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Contre Eunome* I–II [SC 299/305] [Paris: Cerf, 1982–1983]; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomio* I–III; *Confutazione della professione di fede di Eunomio*, in *Opere Dogmatiche*, ed. Claudio Moreschini [Milan: Bompiani, 2014], 681–1726 [*Contra Eunomio*], 1727–1864 [*Confutazione*]). See also in the same volume the instructive introductory essay by Moreschini [127–72]). Here let it suffice to recall the essential nucleus of Basil’s strongest argument, which Luis Ladaria nicely summarizes as follows:

Eunomius based his denial of the Son’s divinity on the fact that he, . . . being generated, could not have the same nature as the unoriginated Father. Basil replies, it is necessary to distinguish two types of names: absolute and relative. Some indicate what a thing is in itself (man, horse, ox, etc.)—others, what an entity is in relation to another (son, slave, friend, etc.). Obviously *gennema* [offspring] belongs to the second category. It tells us, not what the Son is in himself, but his relation with the Father. For this reason, it cannot indicate the essence of the Son, just as “unoriginated” *does not indicate the essence* of the Father. The names “father” and “son” are then applied to God and to men analogously, since God and men are so different from each other. This is possible because these names, being relative, say nothing about what those designated are in themselves, but only indicate the relation that unites them. . . . If we were to think that the noun (i.e., son, offspring) indicated the essence of something, it would follow that all offspring (of any species whatsoever) were



of God's essence with the fact that he is unoriginated betrays the presumptuousness of Eunomius, who claims to define God on the basis of what the verb to be born means in the limited sphere of this-worldly experience. In fact, we have no experience of a type of birth that does not involve creatureliness—that is, becoming, a passage from nonbeing to being. And yet, does the fact that we have no experience of it preclude the possibility that such an eternal way of being born, which does not involve becoming, exists in God—the God whose essence infinitely surpasses human understanding?<sup>24</sup>

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consubstantial. . . . To sum up, the names “father” and “son” indicate not the substance but the relation. (Luis Ladaria Ferrer, *Il Dio vivo e vero: Il mistero della Trinità* [Casale Monferrato, Italy: Edizioni Piemme, 2007], 248–49, emphasis added)

Therefore Basil's refutation of Eunomius, which was then repeated in greater depth by his brother Gregory, stands upon two pillars: (1) the distinction between *ousia* and hypostasis in matters concerning the divinity, which is followed by (2) the distinction between names that we attribute to God by dint of his activity *ad extra* (such as goodness, wisdom, omnipotence, etc.; these nouns are only *epi-noiai*, that is, word-concepts that do not go so far as to grasp *ti esti*, that is, the essence-*ousia* of God) and names that are relative to the hypostases (such as father and son, unoriginated and generated), which speak only about relations within the divine essence and therefore do not impair its incomprehensibility.

24. Eunomius's fundamental error is his presumptuous confidence that he can define God's *ousia* conceptually; this is the topic that Gregory of Nyssa especially insists on in the first and especially in the second book of *Contra Eunomium*. But the theme recurs so often in the writings of all three Cappadocian Fathers that just the complete list of the relevant passages might fill more than a page. In this sense we have good reason to say that the anti-Arian polemic of the Cappadocians played a decisive role in conferring on the later Greek-Byzantine theological and spiritual tradition the apophatic character that distinguishes it so profoundly. On Nyssa's doctrine about the divine names in *Contra Eunomium* II, see Bernard Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ selon Gregoire de Nyssa: Étude systématique du Contre Eunome avec traduction inédite des extraits d'Eunome*, with a preface by Mariette Canévet (Namur, Belgium: Culture et Vérité, 1994). On apophatism as a distinctive feature of the Eastern (and in particular Byzantine-Slavic) theological tradition, I take the liberty of referring the reader to my book, *Al di là della Parola: Apofatismo e Personalismo nel pensiero di Vladimir Lossky*, vol. 1 (Rome: Città Nuova, 2014), 31–260. In my opinion, the radical apophatism of the Cappadocian Fathers remains valid, provided that it is qualified in two respects. On the one hand, as Thomas especially brought to light, between energetic names and divine essence there must be some analogous connection, which Thomas expressed by means of the well-known distinction between (1) the comprehension that the human intellect *in statu viae* (in the wayfaring state) can have of the *res* (thing, object)

And if this God whom no one has ever seen (Jn 1:18) were to reveal to us, as in fact he revealed to us in Christ, that this is precisely how matters stand, why should we not believe him? The fact that there is no such birth in the realm of human

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to which the divine names refer, and (2) the *res* or thing itself. See Ysabel de Andia, *Denys l'Aréopagite: Tradition et métamorphoses* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 185–211). On the other hand, the negative theology of the Cappadocians must be reinterpreted in light of an adequate understanding of the Johannine theology of revelation, at the center of which stands the statement that God's essence, which in the Paschal Mystery becomes analogously and nevertheless really knowable and even visible (in the exalted and pierced flesh of Jesus), is the love-agape that circulates among the divine Persons (see 1 Jn 4:8, 16, 15:9, etc.). Among the many theologians in the Catholic sphere (but not only there) who are moving in this direction, it is enough to cite, by way of example, Luis Ladaria (*La Trinità mistero di comunione* [Milan: Paoline Editoriale Libri, 2004]): "We can think that the Father's love which is identified with the divine nature is at the origin of the procession of the Son and of the Spirit" (173, emphasis added); "the greatest expression of unity among the Persons was seen until now in their reciprocal perichoresis. . . . No boundary can be drawn between the unity of the divine essence and the unity of the reciprocal perichoresis among the Persons" (175, emphasis added); "God's essence is identified with the fullness of being in love and with the eternal exchange thereof" (178, emphasis added). On the need to reinterpret the negative theology proper to the great patristic tradition in light of the central idea of the Johannine theology of revelation, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth of God*, vol. 2 of *Theo-logic*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), chap. 2.B; see also Paolo Prospero, *Al di là della Parola*, vol. 1, III.4.1: "The Antinomy Person/Nature," 564–91). Balthasar writes concerning the permanent incomprehensibility of the mystery of "agape in divinis" (love in divine matters): "Thought's incapacity to exhaust God is one with its incapacity to exhaust the mystery of the Father, who was never a self-enclosed, all-knowing, and all-powerful person. . . . But the Father's always already giving himself away, which thought can neither go behind nor exhaust, is the ultimate ground for God's being incomprehensibly more than any finite concept can comprehend" (*Truth of God*, vol. 2 of *Theo-logic*, 137). There is no need, Balthasar explains, to deny the (analogous but real) knowability of the divine essence as it is revealed to the believer through Christ in the Spirit in order to preserve intact the incomprehensibility of the divine mystery. Indeed, the very fact that in the absolute love of the divine Persons no precedence is given to personal freedom over natural necessity or vice versa, is sufficient to preserve intact the abyss of the inconceivability for the created intellect of this act of love that constitutes divine love. The remarks that follow presuppose, as the reader will easily notice, a *reinterpretation* of the trinitarian discourse of the Cappadocians informed by the most recent findings of contemporary theology, and therefore it must not be interpreted as a philological reconstruction of the debate between Eunomius and the Cappadocians. Obviously ours is a reflection *post-factum* (after the fact), that is, with contemporary eyes, on the *objective* meaning of that controversy, a meaning that can easily be truly present in it while surpassing the understanding of it that its protagonists had at the time.

experience does not mean that it is intrinsically contradictory or irrational. Supraterrestrial and suprarational does not mean impossible or irrational. For this reason, the Cappadocian Fathers conclude, Eunomius's reasoning is erroneous; it is based on a false syllogism. It is true that only the Father is *anarchos*, that is, without beginning, unoriginated. The Son is not *anarchos*. He receives all his own being from the Father. He is truly and genuinely generated by the Father. We must also say that, from the personal or hypostatic perspective, he is nothing but birth—pure reception. And nevertheless this does not prevent him from being God. Furthermore, precisely in receiving all that he has and is from the Father, the Son receives with it the power to co-spirate, together with the Father, the Spirit—at least according to what is professed in the Latin version of the Creed—namely to produce a third divine Person through his own (eternal) receptive act.

Now, what does this subtle theological controversy have to do with the fall of Lucifer? A lot. But before elucidating the “why,” it is necessary to take another step back in time to focus on what has every right to be considered<sup>25</sup> the one and only New Testament passage that dares to elaborate on the mystery we are dealing with: John 8:44.

#### 4. “HE STOOD NOT IN THE TRUTH”: INSIGHTS FROM THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In order to delve adequately into the meaning of any biblical passage, it is a good rule not to extrapolate it from the immediate context in which it is placed. It is not possible to present here a

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25. Normally modern commentators almost unanimously tend to take for granted that in John 8:44b–c we should see nothing more than a reference to the account in Genesis 3 or at most to Wisdom 2:24 (cf., e.g., the comments on the passage by Schnackenburg, Brown, Léon Dufour, Fabris, Ridderbos, Lincoln, Maloney, Keener, Zumstein, etc.). La Potterie too, while offering valuable hints in his in-depth commentary on 8:44, essentially adheres to the typical hermeneutical presupposition of contemporary exegesis (Ignace de La Potterie, *La vérité dans Saint Jean*, vol. 2 [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977], 925ff.). We maintain, however, that there are good reasons to consider valid the interpretation that already existed in the time of Chrysostom, Augustine, and Thomas, whereby John 8:44c contains an *allusion* to the mystery of Lucifer's fall.

detailed commentary on the entire rough verbal duel between Jesus and the “Jews of Jerusalem,” of which John 8:44 is a climactic moment.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it will be useful to dwell on the words of the Johannine Jesus that precede and follow the extremely harsh judgment he passes on his interlocutors in John 8:44a—a judgment that in turn provides him with the occasion to give a short but rather profound teaching about the *mysterium iniquitatis*:

- [A] [Jews:] “We were not born of fornication; *we have one Father, even God.*”
- [B] Jesus said to them: “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. *Why do you not understand what I say?*”
- [C] It is *because you cannot bear to hear my word.* You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.
- [D] He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth [= he stood not in the truth, DRA], because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
- [C] But, *because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.*
- [B] Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, *why do you not believe me?*
- [A] He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that *you are not of God* [ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστέ.]” (Jn 8:41–47, emphasis added)

The words of the Jews that set the “tone” for this portion of the long diatribe taking up most of John 8 should be connected in turn with what precedes them. Let us see how.

Jesus claims to have come to make known *the truth* (i.e., about God) and thus to *make free* (Jn 8:32b) all who become his disciples by listening to his word (Jn 8:31). To this the Jews—a

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26. This climactic function should prove obvious from the subdivision proposed here of the textual unit to which John 8:44 belongs. As we will see, 8:44 is found at the very center of a chiasmic structure. On the function of the chiasmic structure in the Johannine writings, see Peter F. Ellis, *The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984).

term that obviously has no ethnic connotation here<sup>27</sup>—reply indignantly that *they need no liberation* (8:33b).<sup>28</sup> They are indeed

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27. I cannot dwell here on the delicate debate about the meaning of the expression *hoi ioudaioi* in the fourth gospel. For a precise *status quaestionis* and a well-calibrated response to the accusations of anti-Semitism that are still leveled against the fourth evangelist in recent times, I refer the reader to Maurizio Marcheselli, *Studi sul vangelo di Giovanni: Testi, temi e contesto storico* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2016), 239–353. For a narratological characterization of the person of the “Jews” in the fourth gospel, see *ibid.*, 354–73. Personally, I think we can and must uphold at least three “postulates” when we speak about the “Johannine Jews.” First, the title/name “the Jews,” when it is used with a negative connotation, does not designate the Jews as an ethnic entity but rather as a specific group of Jews characterized by a certain spiritual posture that leads them to reject Jesus (cf. Juan Mateos and Juan Barreto, *Dizionario teologico del Vangelo di Giovanni* [Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1982], 144). Second, this group can be identified more or less with an elite of religious leaders and distinguished persons, which has its headquarters in Jerusalem (cf. Jn 7:13, 9:22, 19:38, 20:19. Especially in the first two passages, the distinction and even opposition between “the Jews,” understood in the restricted sense as the religious elite residing in Jerusalem, and the people—which obviously is also made up of ethnically Jewish persons—is remarked upon explicitly). Third, as documented by almost all the chapters (5–10), but most eloquently and explicitly in John 9, the spiritual posture peculiar to the “Jews” (of which they are the archetype) is the position of someone who thinks that he already knows everything that there is to know about the Lord and about his ways (9:40–44), while in reality having no true knowledge about him (5:37–38, 8:19, 54–55) and cherishing no authentic love for him (Jn 5:42, 44, 8:47, etc.). In this sense *only* Jewishness (*giudaicità*, in the ethnic-religious sense) does in fact play a decisive role in the make-up of the “personage” of the Jews. These “Jews” base their own (erroneous) self-conviction that they know all that there is to know about God on their effective nobility of birth and superior knowledge of God (in comparison to the Gentiles and to the common people: Jn 7:48–49, 9:34). As we will see, we have here precisely the subtle but extremely important parallelism that links (from a symbolic and theological perspective) these *ioudaioi* to the one whom the Johannine Jesus does not fear to designate as their “spiritual father”: the devil (Jn 8:44). The topic needs to be examined in much greater depth than can be done here.

28. Note that the point here, unlike elsewhere in the fourth gospel, is not a simple *misunderstanding*—as though Jesus’ interlocutors had in mind a material freedom while the Lord is thinking about a higher, spiritual freedom. From a material, that is to say *political*, perspective, it is indeed quite clear to the Jews that they are not free at all from the foreign yoke. The freedom that they attribute to themselves is therefore of a religious and spiritual nature no less than the one promised by Jesus. The conflict therefore has to do with their respective interpretations of the law. For the adversaries of Jesus, the circumcision of Abraham and the law of Moses suffice to make a man free, that is, to make him *a son of God* for all intents and purposes (Jn 8:41). According to the Johannine Jesus, however, the law does not have this power unless faith in him is added (Jn 8:34–36).

descendants of Abraham (8:33a, 39) and as such can boast of having God himself as their father (8:41).<sup>29</sup> Jesus' rebuttal deserves close examination:

- [A] Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father,  
 [B] you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth  
     from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent  
     me.  
 [C] Why do you not understand what I say? It is because  
     you cannot bear to hear my word.  
 [D] You are of your father the devil." (Jn 8:42–44)

As often happens with the Johannine Jesus, the words just cited seem on a first reading so direct as to need no in-depth analysis. Jesus' argument can be expressed schematically as follows: on the one hand (A), these men boast of having God as their Father (Jn 8:41). On the other hand (B), they do not love and cannot bear the words (C) of the one whom God sent to speak to them in his name (B). Therefore, they are not sons of God, since a true son listens to what his father says. Instead they are sons of the one who is the founding father of all those who refuse to listen to God's word, namely the devil (D).

At this point we could ask whether Jesus' conclusion is not excessively harsh: his reasoning seems to be based on the assumption that these Jews know that he is God's spokesman and yet (diabolically) decide to rebel against the Lord's word, knowing that it is such. Nevertheless, it is at least debatable whether that is actually the case, if it is true that they do not believe that he is who he claims to be (Jn 12:37ff.). In order to respond to this objection, it is necessary to reread more attentively John 8:42 against the background of another passage taken from the preceding verbal duel between Jesus and the Jews (cf. Jn 7:14–24).

- [A] If any man's will is to do his [God's] will,  
 [Ἐάν τις θέλῃ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ποιεῖν]

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29. Here too it is indicative that much could be said about the different meanings that Jesus and his adversaries attribute to both the ties of "descent": for the Jews, "sonship," both in relation to Abraham and to God, is a *possession* to boast about that confers on them their honor and power. For Jesus, the same word designates instead a spiritual attitude—that of a son who imitates his father and obeys his commands (Jn 8:37b, 40b, 42b).

- [B] he shall know  
[γνώσεται]
- [C] whether the teaching is *from God*  
[περὶ τῆς διδασκαλίας πότερον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν]
- [D] or whether I am speaking *on my own authority*  
[ἢ ἐγὼ ἀπ’ ἐμαντοῦ λαλῶ]. (Jn 7:17, emphasis added)
- [A] If God were your Father,  
[Εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἦν]
- [B] you would love me,  
[ἠγαπᾶτε ἂν ἐμέ]
- [C] for I proceeded and came forth from God;  
[ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἦκω]
- [D] I came not of my own accord  
[οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπ’ ἐμαντοῦ ἐλήλυθα].  
(Jn 8:42, emphasis added)

The resemblance between the two texts is undeniable. Omitting a detailed analysis of the parallelisms, the crucial thing to understand is that in both cases Jesus’ “syllogistic” argument presupposes reference to the type of knowledge that Thomas would have called *cognitio per connaturalitatem* (like recognizes and loves like). In John 7:17, Jesus bases the ability of *those who love God* to recognize immediately the divine origin of his teaching on the fact that *he* loves God and does not “seek his own glory” (τὴν δόξαν τὴν ἰδίαν: 7:18) but rather God’s alone.<sup>30</sup> In John 8:42, he states similarly that he who cherishes sincere filial sentiments toward God cannot help but love Jesus, since he cannot help but intuit that Jesus too is moved in what he does and says by a filial love for God.

The reason for the harshness of Jesus’ judgment thus comes to light fully: since the “glory” that shines from Jesus is the “glory” of “the only begotten Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14),<sup>31</sup> the very fact that these men are not attracted by him proves how false their claim to be sons of God is. If they loved God as true sons, then they could not help but “recognize themselves” in

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30. “He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood” (Jn 7:18).

31. On the filial character of Jesus’ *doxa*, see the still-valid comments by Ignace de La Potterie on John 1:14 in *La vérité dans Saint Jean*, vol. 1 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 176–99.

the one who exudes “filial obedience to God” from every pore, so to speak; they would see in him the surpassing realization of that to which they aspire. If this does not happen, it is not because of his arrogant and blasphemous claim to put himself in God’s place, as they repeatedly say (Jn 5, 8, 10:33, etc.); but rather for the opposite reason, namely because in him there is not even one drop of that Luciferian “ego-latrous” (from the Italian “*ego-latrica*,” meaning “self-worshipping”) spirit that *secretly* possesses them:

But I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not *seek the glory* that comes from the only God? (Jn 5:42–44, emphasis added)<sup>32</sup>

Thus we can understand the irony of the situation: the Jews accuse Jesus of arrogant blasphemy because he calls God his Father and thus makes himself equal to God<sup>33</sup> while being only a man.<sup>34</sup> Jesus *does not deny* having made such claims. What he denies is that the reason for the hostility of his interlocutors is his “ego-latrous” arrogance. Paradoxically, the contrary is true: they hate him precisely because he does not come in his own name (Jn 5:43b) but rather finds his glory in pleasing God alone (5:44c, cf. 8:54). The paradox obviously finds its most profound (and ironic) explanation in the fact that being like God (Jn 5:18) and being God (10:33) means for Jesus something partly different and even contrary to what the same words designate for his interlocutors. From the perspective of the Jews, to claim to be like God means to enter into competition with God, that is, to

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32. Unfortunately there is no space here to dwell on the subtle and sublime ambiguity of the use of the term *doxa* in this text—just as in the other two passages of the polemical discourses (cf. the vocabulary *doxa/doxazein* in Jn 7:18). I will deal explicitly with this topic in a forthcoming essay, “Clash of Glories: Anatomy of a War.”

33. “This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God” (Jn 5:18).

34. “The Jews answered him, ‘We stone you for no good work *but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God*’” (Jn 10:33, emphasis added).



emulate his absolute autonomy and sovereign power. From Jesus' perspective, this is not entirely accurate because being God does not mean for him only possessing divine powers, but also and above all receiving all that he has and is and does from an Other—something that John had already explained in the prologue of his gospel, when he specified that the divine glory (*doxa*) of Jesus is indeed his own (αὐτοῦ), but at the same time is glory “as of the only begotten Son from the Father” (δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός) (Jn 1:14).<sup>35</sup>

At this point we are ready to move on to the specifically satanological section of John 8:44 (44b–d), which has the task of explaining why or in what sense Jesus feels authorized to regard the devil as the “father” of these men.

- [A] “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.  
[ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστέ καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν]
- [B] He was a murderer from the beginning,  
[ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρωποκτόνος ἦν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς]
- [C] and did not stand in the truth,  
[ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ οὐκ ἔστηκεν]
- [D] because there is no truth in him.  
[ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια ἐν αὐτῷ]
- [E] When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature<sup>36</sup>  
[ὅταν λαλή τὸ ψεῦδος, ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων λαλεῖ]
- [F] for he is a liar and the father of lies  
[ὅτι ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ].” (Jn 8:44)

Disregarding (B) for the time being, let us start by focusing on what is perhaps the most mysterious portion of the whole, namely (C). On which occasion exactly did the devil not stand in the truth, and what exactly does Jesus mean with these words?

The most prudent answer might seem to connect (C) back to (B) and thus to interpret it as a reference to the drama of the fall as narrated in Genesis 3. Most scholars do this. The

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35. This clash of opposite perspectives on the very meaning of the notion of *divine doxa* is expressed most intensely in John 8:53–54, an important passage that rarely gets the attention that it deserves. See section 5 below.

36. Literally, “from his own things.” The more literal English translation of John 8:44c is from the Douay-Rheims (DRA) version.

devil lied or used a lie (E–F) as a means of carrying out his homicidal plan—for he is a murderer of men (ἀνθρωποκτόνος) from the beginning (B). According to this reading, the fundamental desire (A) that moves the devil is the envious determination to kill Adam, whom God had destined to immortal life (Wis 2:23–24), and falsehood is a means to the fulfillment of this desire (Gn 3:4–5, 10).<sup>37</sup> If we accept this reading, it is easy to see where the analogy with the Jews lies. As the devil used a lie as a means of killing Adam, so the Jews are using lies as a means of achieving their only goal, which is to eliminate Jesus, the new Adam.

This reading is certainly not wrong, but it hardly does full justice to the depth of Jesus' words. In particular, it does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the mysterious expression "he did not stand in the truth for there is no truth in him," which clearly points to the devil's personal moving away from the truth and thus to the mystery of his own "original sin"—*pace* La Potterie and most modern commentators.<sup>38</sup> To say that the devil is the father of lies certainly means that every human lie, starting with Adam's self-deception, draws from him. But it also undeniably means that he is the first of all liars, which again implies that his not standing in the truth began before the tragedy of Eden. What exactly was his primordial lie, and when did he tell it?

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37. See Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2 (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1990), 213.

38. See note 24 above. There are two interwoven reasons why this reading is to be preferred. First, it is undeniable that if we interpret the devil's not standing in the truth as referring exclusively to the serpent's lie in the narrative of Genesis 3, then the devil's lie is reduced to nothing more than a means he uses to pursue his only end: to kill man. But this is incompatible with Jesus' insistence (see Jn 8:44c–f) on the devil's lack of kinship with the truth. Quantitatively speaking, the latter theme receives even much more attention and weight in John 8:44 than "the devil as murderer." Second, and more to the point, it remains completely unclear why the devil is a murderer in the first place. One might say that the Johannine Jesus is not interested in giving an explanation here. That the devil hates man is a matter of fact. This is possible. However, if we adopt the second reading, we get (i) a suggestive explanation of the reason why the devil is "a murderer from the beginning," and (ii) an explanation of the reason why Jesus focuses on the devil's being a liar much more than he does on his being a murderer.

I believe Augustine,<sup>39</sup> closely followed on this by Thomas Aquinas,<sup>40</sup> was right when he insisted that the Johannine Jesus' sibylline words refer to Lucifer's rebellion against and denial of the most basic truth any created spirit is called to recognize and welcome along with the gift of existence: that God is the source of all being and beatitude. This is the primordial truth in which the devil, in his craving for godlike autonomy and power, has not remained steadfast. And this is why the Johannine Jesus can say that "in him there is no truth at all."<sup>41</sup> For if one denies the first and most evident truth of all, are not truths that come afterward compromised altogether?

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39. "The words of the Lord about the devil: 'He was a murderer from the beginning and did not stand fast in the truth' . . . have to be understood as meaning not merely that the devil was a murderer from the beginning of the human race, from the time of the creation of man, whom the devil could deceive and bring to death, but that even from the beginning of his own creation the devil did not stand fast in the truth, and for that reason he never enjoyed felicity with the holy angels, *because he refused to be subject to his Creator, and in his arrogance supposed that he wielded power as his own private possession and rejoiced in that power*. And thus he was both deceived and deceiving, because no one can escape the power of the Omnipotent. *He has refused to accept reality and in his arrogant pride presumes to counterfeit an unreality*" (*City of God* 11.13; see also 12.1, 14.3–4, 14.13 [trans. Henry Bettenson, 445]; *De Genesi ad litteram* 11.23, 30).

40. See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* II, §1244–46.

41. The objection that such an interpretation would not fit with John's christological understanding of truth as revelation of God (La Potterie) does not affect my proposal. In fact, it strengthens it. As John made clear in the Prologue, all creation carries already the stamp of the Logos/Son, if it is true that all that exists has been made *through the Word of God* (Jn 1:13). One may therefore say that *truth/aletheia* works here again as a *figural concept*, if by this we mean that the self-revelation of the mystery of God's fatherly love is already foreshadowed in the spiritual (angelic or human) creature's realization that his existence is a gift from *God the Creator*. The devil's refusal to stick to the primordial evidence of this dependence on God's love, is in this sense already a rejection of Christ, albeit implicitly. La Potterie has insightfully seen and penetratingly elucidated the anti-filial essence of the devil's lie (*La vérité dans Saint Jean*, vol. 2, 932–33). However, he downplays any possible allusion in our text to the fall of the devil and to the peculiar character of his *lie*—which in my view is *in actu primo* a denial of his creaturely status and only consequently a rejection of the christological truth. The result is that in La Potterie's account there is a danger that the devil's lie remains more an abstract state than an act. John, however, alludes in (C) to an act ("he did not stand in": οὐκ ἔστηκεν) no less than to the state that follows this act.

Something similar is true about the men standing in front of Jesus. Right after the saying on the devil, he continues:

Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me [ἐγὼ δὲ ὄτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω, οὐ πιστεύετε μοι]. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is [born] of God hears [listens to] the words of God; the reason why you do not hear [listen to] them is that you are not [born] of God. (Jn 8:45–47)

Why do the Jews not believe in Jesus' *word*? The paradoxical answer Jesus provides is the following: precisely *because* he is telling the truth on God's behalf. In other words, it is not as if these men did not believe despite the fact that they suppose he is telling the truth. They reject him *precisely because* he tells them the truth, which is what they have come to hate. For no one can even try to usurp God's place, in one's own life or in that of others, unless one has built one's entire existence on a lie, on forgetfulness of the most basic truth of existence: one's complete dependence on God.

Thus the bond between Jesus' interlocutors and the devil starts to become clearer. No doubt self-exalting "ego-latry" (Jn 5:43), as we called it above, is from a Johannine perspective the innermost essence of sin. But "ego-latry" by its very nature presupposes and demands that one "did not stand in the truth," that is, that one has refused to let God be the one who establishes the truth of the whole of reality, starting with one's very self. It follows that the evil one is for John essentially a liar, a denier of truth (8:44–45) and that the more a human being is caught up in the same "ego-latrous" will to power that drives the ruler of this world, the more he or she will tend, consciously or unconsciously, to be a denier of truth (any truth) as well.<sup>42</sup> It cannot be otherwise, since the only possible way for the creature to replace the Creator is by reforging the meaning of a reality that she herself did not make. Not standing in the truth (8:44c), that

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42. The words of the *starets* (Elder) Zosima to Fyodor Karamazov, who names himself "father of lies," are worth quoting here: "Above all, do not lie to yourself. A man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point where he does not discern any truth either in himself or anywhere around him, and thus falls into disrespect towards himself and others. Not respecting anyone, he ceases to love" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004], 44).

is, reinventing the meaning of things, is ultimately the only way for the sinning creature to achieve his dream, which is to “make [herself] like the Most High” (Is 14:14; see Jn 5:19, 10:33).

At this point we are ready to go back to John 8:44b, which we deliberately passed over earlier. In reading John 8:44b someone might wonder, why was the devil a murderer from the beginning? The reader who is familiar with Scripture (cf. Wis 2:23) would immediately answer: out of envy. This is definitely plausible.<sup>43</sup> And yet, if one adopts the exegesis proposed above (C), another answer becomes much more attractive. If, as suggested above, the quintessential lie (ψεῦδος)<sup>44</sup> of the devil is his refusal to “know his place” (stand in the truth), then it makes sense that he hated another spiritual creature who, although lower than him (cf. Ps 8:5), stands in the truth (unlike him) and finds joy, glory, and honor (Ps 8:5) precisely in obeying God’s commandment. What the devil hated in Adam and Eve, we can say, is that he saw in them precisely the kind of “glory” that he himself despised and rejected. In short, and in more Johannine language, as the world loves that which is its own (τὸ ἴδιον ἐφίλει: Jn 15:19; see also Jn 7:7a) and hates that which is not from itself (ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου: Jn 15:19, 8:23, 17:16), so a fortiori its ruler must do so (Jn 12:31): he “loves” only that which is (born) from him (8:44a).

Thus we come to the real crux of the matter. If we ask, what exactly can be born from him and from him alone? Of what can he be the “absolute” (*anarchos*, unoriginated) father? The answer, as we have seen, is essentially only one thing: the spirit of falsehood understood as the will to independence from God (8:44a). This, then, we may say, is what the devil pursues in tempting Adam: the multiplication of his only possible

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43. In my view, it is significant that in the fourth gospel, in contrast to the synoptics, the word *phthonos* never occurs to explain the Jews’ hatred against Jesus. For John, the cause of the rejection is deeper than the Jews’ envy, although this element is obviously not absent.

44. The untranslatable expression used by Jesus in 8:44e, ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων λαλεῖ, deserves attention. The formula τὰ ἴδια (in the plural) indicates as a rule in John one’s “home” (Jn 1:11, 19:27): *falsehood* is where the devil is at home. In this sense it is correct to translate the expression, as for example the RSV-CE (2nd ed.) does, with *nature*, but not in the sense that the devil was created evil; John 8:44c clearly forbids such an interpretation. Rather, because there truly is a sense in which the devil was born as such in and from a lie—i.e., the devil’s own decision to live as if God did not exist—we might say.

“offspring/child,” that is, “ego-latry.” It is true, the devil cannot create out of nothing. But he can spread the seed of that lie which was born of him and him alone, becoming thereby a sort of counterfeit father.<sup>45</sup> In this respect, it is important to note that according to the narrative of Genesis 3, which John clearly has in mind in John 8:44b, the devil/serpent does not materially “kill” Adam. And it is highly debatable that his primary goal was to make him die in a physical sense.<sup>46</sup> What the devil does is to try to convince Adam to rebel against God as he himself did. In other words, his true end is to remake Adam in his own image and likeness—to make of him, so to say, his counterfeit “child.”<sup>47</sup>

Thus the Melkorian desire (see *Ainulindalë*) to produce/generate out of oneself alone arises again in a text from which we may not have expected it. For is all this not reminiscent of the paradoxical coincidence of the spirit of destruction and lust for “absolute paternity” that we encountered in Tolkien’s Melkor/Morgoth?

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45. From this point of departure, it would be intriguing to reflect on all sorts of interesting paradoxes and antinomies resulting from this counterfeit of the father-son relation in the very relation between the devil and his children. But we must leave this topic for another occasion.

46. This is why some scholars prefer to see here an allusion to Cain’s murder of Adam rather than to the Fall narrated in Genesis 3. In my view, this is highly improbable. Everything Jesus says in John 8:44 definitely makes more sense if we take Genesis 3 as the primary figural background. Arguably, as *life* (*zoe*) in John’s writings is a primarily spiritual reality (which encompasses but also surpasses physical life), so too is the reality of death.

47. Along these lines, it is easier to understand what the Johannine Jesus means when he tells the Jews that they are (born) from their “father the devil” (ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου) and that their “will is to do their father’s desires.” Jesus is not saying that these men are “children” of the devil or even possessed by him in the literal sense of the word. But rather that their very hatred for a man, whom no one can convict of sin (8:46a)—so radiant is his filial love for God—reveals their spiritual kinship with the one who in the beginning did the same thing, i.e., hated a (still) innocent man (Gn 2:25). I would suggest, in this sense, that the reference to the devil’s hatred for the first Adam lurks in John 8:44a as a sort of figure, by means of which the Johannine Jesus sheds light on the secret roots of the hatred of the Jews for him. The devil hated in Adam his innocent, childlike docility to God. He could not stand it and wanted to destroy it. The same is true of the Jews. They hate him because of his filial love for God and complete lack of self-glorifying attitude. The difference is that, while the devil was able to make Adam fall and become somehow a member of his family, this proved impossible with Jesus. There was no way for the ruler of the world to draw him to his side—not even in the hour of the final confrontation (Jn 14:30–31).

One last point deserves consideration. If we are to believe the Johannine Jesus, the main lie of his accusers seems to be that they claim to know God when in fact they do not know him and have never seen his form (*eidōs*: Jn 5:37).

“Yet I do not seek my own glory [ἐγὼ δὲ οὐ ζητῶ τὴν δόξαν μου]; there is One who seeks it and he will be the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if any one keeps my word, he will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, as did the prophets; and you say, ‘If any one keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! *Who do you claim to be?*” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is your God. But you have not known him; I know him. If I said, I do not know him, I should be a *liar* like you [ἔσομαι ὅμοιος ὑμῖν ψεύστης]; but I do know him and I keep his word.” (Jn 8:50–55, emphasis added)

The dynamic of the “turning of the tables,” which, as we mentioned above, shapes the dispute between Jesus and his opponents from beginning (Jn 5:9ff.) to end (Jn 10:31ff.), is clearly operative here more than ever. The Jews, who understand the divine claim entailed in Jesus’ words about death (which incidentally they misunderstood slightly: Jn 8:52–53; cf. Jn 5:21ff.), accuse him of lying in order to make himself more than he is. Jesus turns the charge against the accusers. They rather are the ones who lie and make themselves more than they are, for they claim to know much more about God than they actually do (D–E).<sup>48</sup> Why do they do this?

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48. The whole interpretation of Israel’s Scriptures is implicitly at stake here. Jesus is not implying that God has not already revealed himself to Moses and to Israel (Jn 1:17, 5:39, 45–47). What he does imply is that since even Moses had seen nothing more than God’s back (Ex 33:18–23; cf. Jn 1:17–18), if they truly wanted to be Moses’s disciples they should recognize at the very least that their knowledge of God is imperfect. Certainly it is debatable whether or not Jesus is right in claiming that Moses wrote of him (Jn 5:46b). However, if the Johannine Jesus does not go into details, this is because what is truly at stake for him is the overall interpretation of the Mosaic revelation as complete, or rather as waiting for a completion and open to it. From this perspective, the Jews should in principle give Jesus a chance—as Nicodemus invites them to do (Jn 7:51)—precisely because they should know, based on their knowledge of the law and on their experience of

Evidently, for the same reason their father did not stand in the truth: they crave power and (what they take to be) glory. They want to make themselves like God (Is 14:12–15). The irony is that in so doing they let their own lie—that is, how little in fact they know about the glory of the God whom they claim to know (and secretly wish to resemble)—come to light. If they knew what it truly means to be like God (Jn 17:3) and to share in his glory, they would be glad to “know their place” in perfect imitation of the divine Son, whose glory depends on and even coincides with his total dedication to doing the will of an Other: his Father.

#### 5. WHAT DOES IT TRULY MEAN TO BE LIKE GOD?

For a better understanding of this crucial point, which lies at the very heart of John’s paradoxical theology of glory (*doxa*),<sup>49</sup> we need to focus on the first part of Jesus’ final answer to the most important question that is asked him in the entire gospel:

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God, how much they still do not know about God and his mysterious ways (Is 40:13–14; Job 11:7, etc.).

49. On the glory motif in John, see Bernard Botte, “La gloire du Christ dans l’Évangile de Saint Jean,” *Questions Liturgiques et Paroissiales* 12 (1927): 65–76; Jean Dupont, *Essais sur la Christologie de Saint Jean* (Bruges, Belgium: Abbaye de Saint André, 1951), 253–93; Willem Grossouw, “La glorification du Christ dans le quatrième Évangile,” in *L’Évangile de Jean. Études et problèmes*, Recherches Bibliques 3, ed. Marie-Émile Boismard et al. (Bruges, Belgium: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958), 131–45; Cornelio Traets, *Voir Jésus et le Père en Lui selon l’Évangile de Saint Jean* (Rome: Libreria editrice dell’Università Gregoriana, 1967), 89–106; Ignace de La Potterie, *La vérité dans Jean*, vol. 1 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 191–99; Wilhelm Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium*, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 21.1–2 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1960). After the classic work of Wilhelm Thüsing, there are two major works consecrated to the study of *doxa* in the fourth gospel: Nicole Chibici-Revneanu, *Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten: Das Verständnis der doxa im Johannesevangelium*, WUNT [= Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament] 2.231 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), and Rainer Schwindt, *Gesichte der Herrlichkeit. Eine exegetisch-traditionsgeschichtliche Studie zur paulinischen und johanneischen Christologie* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2007). Important also is the more recent article by Jörg Frey, “The Glory of the Crucified One,” in *The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 237–58. In the English-speaking world, the most important recent contribution to the topic is the succinct but substantial discussion by Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2015), 43–75.



“Who do you claim to be?” [τίνα σεαυτὸν ποιεῖς] Jesus answered: “If I glorify myself [Ἐὰν ἐγὼ δοξάσω ἑμαυτὸν] my glory is nothing [ἡ δόξα μου οὐδὲν ἐστίν]. It is my Father who glorifies me [ἔστιν ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ δοξάζων με].” (Jn 8:53–54)

Unfortunately, I cannot lay out here why I think it is necessary to understand the expression “my glory” (ἡ δόξα μου) not only in the worldly sense of honor but also in the technical–theological sense of *divine* glory.<sup>50</sup> It is enough to point out the crucial consequences of the second interpretation: as soon as we read John 8:54, assuming that the word *doxa* also indicates here his divine *doxa*,<sup>51</sup> what

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50. I will set out to clarify the crucial function of this semantic ambiguity in the overall architecture of the Johannine theology of glory in my forthcoming article, “Clash of Glories: Anatomy of a War.” Let it suffice here to list at least two reasons why I think it is reductive to give to the term *doxa* only the colloquial, nontheological sense of “honor, good reputation.” No doubt, what Jesus is speaking of here is his honor and reputation *among men*—an honor the Father takes care to secure through the works he gives the Son the power to do. There are, however, at least two clear signs that something more is going on here. First, Jesus responds to a precise accusation. Through their question, the Jews *unequivocally* allude to Jesus’ claim to be equal to God. And this necessarily means that the kind of glory/honor they accuse Jesus of illegitimately seeking is not generically too great but rather specifically divine. It is crucial to stress that, in responding that the Father is the one who grants him his glory (Jn 8:54b), Jesus retracts “nothing of the claim the Jews see in his words” (cf. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2). On the contrary, he confirms it, for what the Father makes radiantly manifest in honoring him is precisely the truthfulness of his divine claim. In this way, the boundaries between the ordinary (honor/personal prestige) and the theological meaning of *doxa* (visible manifestation of God’s being) imperceptibly but decisively blur. In fact, for the Father to defend and vindicate Jesus’ honor (= glorifying him), means to make radiantly visible that he truly is his divine Son. The second “sign” is strictly tied to the first. The attentive reader cannot miss the fact that for the first time Jesus explicitly speaks of his glory (ἡ δόξα μου) in positive terms. Despite the fact he does not seek it (Jn 7:18, 8:50), there is such a thing as his glory (8:54b). It is the glory Jesus receives from the Father. The same attentive reader should at this point remember that John’s gospel has already mentioned Jesus’ glory twice (1:14, 2:11). He can therefore legitimately wonder whether this “glory of mine” (ἡ δόξα μου) is just the honor Jesus receives as a man through the Father, or rather the “divine glory/*doxa* as of an only Son” that the Father gives him by eternally generating him. The least we can say, then, is that Jesus’ expression is ambiguous.

51. Thomas Aquinas already insightfully perceived the importance of this ambiguity and pointed out that Jesus’ saying makes sense both ways—whether we intend *doxa* as divine *or* as human. Although he gives preference to the second, he presents both as legitimate readings and unpacks them as follows:

we get is a perfect description of the paradoxical character of Jesus' divine glory, and by that very fact the most formidable answer possible to the question posed to him by his adversaries. Indeed, on the one hand Jesus does not deny (Schnackenburg) but rather confirms what the Jews have guessed: he does claim divine glory for himself. On the other hand, he rejects the accusation of being an arrogant, egocentric boaster: not only because his claim is true, but also and most notably because this glory that he claims for himself (ἡ δόξα μου) is not the *kind* of glory they think it to be. In fact, his way of being God implies the most radical dependence on and reliance upon someone other than himself, that is, the Father: "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing" (Jn 8:54).

But there is more. Upon careful consideration, John 8:54a can also be understood in two equally valid ways, depending on whether we place the accent on the subject (ἐγὼ, option a) or on the object (ἐμαυτόν, option b). If we choose option a, Jesus is saying that the Son has his glory from the Father who begets him (Thomas Aquinas). If we choose option b, Jesus is no longer (or not only) saying that he himself is not the personal origin of his glory, but rather that the substance of his glory, that is, of his personal honor, lies in honoring, that is to say, in loving the Father as the Father loves him. In his earthly existence, this filial love takes the form of the Son's zealous dedication to fulfilling the Father's will in perfect obedience (La Potterie).

Thus it becomes clear why the Johannine Jesus can rightly say (in an admittedly bewildering way) that his glory, that is, the earthly manifestation of his filial mystery, becomes visible

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"He says: You ask me, *Who do you claim to be?* As if I am usurping a glory that I do not have. But this is a false assumption on your part, because I do not make myself what I am, but I have received it from the Father: for if I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. Now this could be understood of Christ according as he is the Son of God, as though saying in precise language: if I, namely, myself, glorify myself, that is, ascribe to myself a glory which the Father does not give me, my glory is nothing. For the glory of Christ according as he is God is the glory of the Word and the Son of God. But the Son has nothing except being begotten, i.e., what he has received from another (the Father) by being begotten. Therefore, assuming the impossible, if his glory were not from another, it would not be the glory of the Son. However, it seems better to suppose that this is said of Christ according as he is man, because anyone who ascribes to himself a glory he does not have from God, has a false glory. For whatever is true is from God. . . . Therefore, a glory which is not from God is nothing" (*Commentary on the Gospel of John* II, §1277, emphasis added).

precisely in the fact that he does not seek his own glory (8:50c), in the mundane sense of exalting himself above everyone else, or, what amounts to the same thing, in the fact that he does not glorify himself (8:54a). Since his glory (in the theological sense of divine *doxa*) is glory as of an only begotten Son (Jn 1:14), to manifest his glory means for him to make radiantly visible the fact that his honor lies entirely in his receptive openness to the Father and in his dedication to his will.

We touch here the paradoxical center of John's theology of glory. For Jesus there is no contradiction between the repeated claim that he does not seek his own glory, understood in the mundane sense of seeking men's approval and praise (Jn 5:41, 44, 7:18, 8:50) and the claim to divine glory. And this simply because the *doxa* of the true God and the *doxa* the Jews think he ascribes to himself—the *doxa* of a God, who is in fact the projection of their own idea of dignity and prestige—are diametrically opposed. John's subtle way of playing on the two meanings of *doxa*—the glory of God as opposed to the glory of men (cf. 12:43), does not simply note a difference. More profoundly, it shows how the glory of God, by the very fact that it appears in Christ, exposes and judges the emptiness of the kind of glory men pursue and even ascribe to God (perhaps unconsciously, but certainly presumptuously).

In short, the tragic mistake of Jesus' accusers lies not in their desire for glory, but rather in the fact that they seek and adore a fake one. Arthur Ramsey had already expressed this key point well.

It is in the mutual self-giving of the Father and the Son, expressed in the dependence and submission of the Son throughout His earthly mission, that the deepest meaning of the glory lies. Jesus realizes His own glory only as He makes Himself as nought in the quest of the glory of the Father. The contrast is therefore plain between glory in the pagan sense and glory as Jesus reveals it. Men seek the glory of personal distinction through the praise and esteem of their fellows: Jesus reveals the glory of self-giving love, which is the glory of the Father and the Son. . . . Such is the glory, wherein the Father glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father, alike in eternity and history. Here we touch the heart of Johannine theology.<sup>52</sup>

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52. Arthur M. Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 65.

## 6. A FATEFUL PRESUMPTION

And this makes certain that the first proud being,  
 Who was the paragon of every creature,  
 By not awaiting light fell immature.  
 —Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto XIX, 46–48

At this point we have all the elements needed to answer the question that was previously left unsettled about the connection between the mystery of Lucifer's fall and the controversy between the Cappadocian Fathers and Eunomius.

First of all, let us recapitulate the two central insights derived from our study of John 8:44 and its context. First, to say that Lucifer did not stand firm in the faith means that he denied the first truth that a spiritual creature cannot help but intuit at the very instant she is brought into being: starting with the good of existence, with God as the source of all good.

Second, why did Lucifer ever deny such an obvious truth through a sort of "voluntary dismissal"?<sup>53</sup> What was the source of the first outburst of *hubris*? The answer that John 8:44 (read in its broader context) has enabled us to find can be summarized thus: he convinced himself that if he had remained standing in the truth (8:44), understood in the sense elucidated above, his desire to be like God would have remained unsatisfied, frustrated.<sup>54</sup> In other words, he considered his own creaturely dependence on God as incompatible with his desire to become like him (recall the Thomistic expression *ut Deus*). The spirit's short-circuit would therefore take the form of a tragic split between *verum* and *bonum*, between truth and happiness/beatitude.

But if that is so, where exactly is the error? Might it not be true, as we already asked ourselves, that in any case he could not have become like God, beyond the vague promises

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53. This theme too would need to be explained in greater depth. Is culpable, that is to say, voluntary blindness possible? If so, in what way is this phenomenon involved in explaining not only Lucifer's fall but also the failure of Jesus' public ministry? We will seek to address these questions in the final section of "Clash of Glories: Anatomy of a War."

54. Note that even the Christian novelist who perhaps explored most profoundly the mysterious fascination of anarchy—Fyodor Dostoyevsky—was an avid reader of the fourth gospel, which he knew by heart.

that Scripture<sup>55</sup> and the Greek Fathers<sup>56</sup> speak about very emphatically? More precisely, in Tolkien's terms, is it not perhaps true that he could never have become creative *in the way* in which God is creative?

This is where the controversy between the Cappadocian Fathers and Eunomius, if reread with "Johannine eyes," reveals its full relevance: the answer to these questions is both yes from a *certain* perspective, and no from *every* perspective. The heart of the tragedy lies precisely in this distinction: as Eunomius would do after him, the great spirit sinned by presumption. He presumed to know about God—and note well that this is an unfounded and therefore culpable assumption<sup>57</sup>—more than what in fact had been given to him to know.<sup>58</sup> Like Eunomius,

55. Cf. 1 Jn 3:1–2; 2 Pt 1:4; Col 3:4, etc.

56. On the topic of *theosis* (divinization) in the Greek Fathers, there is a vast bibliography. See, for example, Jules Gross, *La divinisation du chrétien d'après les Pères grecs: Contribution historique à la doctrine de la grâce* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1938); Mhyrra Lot-Borodine, *La déification de l'homme selon la doctrine des Pères grecs* (Paris: Cerf, 1970); Ysabel de Andia, *Henosis: L'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1996); Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

57. In this sense, the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees that concludes John 9 provides a decisive key for elucidating not only the mystery of the incredulity of the most "learned" members of the chosen people, but also the mystery of the fall of the one whom Jesus declares to be their father in spirit (Jn 8:44). "Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, 'Are we also blind?'" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains'" (Jn 9:39–41, emphasis added).

58. Cf. Jn 9:41. A crucial presupposition of the thesis upheld here is obviously the *theologoumenon* whereby the angels too, no less than men, were ignorant of the mystery of the Father and the Son before the Incarnate Son revealed it: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27). Thomas discusses the limit of natural angelic knowledge in *ST* I, q. 56, q. 3, though he does not address the question explicitly. However, the fact that the economy of the Word-made-flesh involves a real increase in knowledge for the angels too, is stated forthrightly even by Paul, who speaks significantly about a *polypoikilos* (= multiform, multicolored, complex) *sophia*, which through the Church becomes known to the angels: "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, that

Lucifer convinced himself that being like God means to act anarchically, that is, to be the unprincipled principle of his own acts, to obey nothing except his own will. And consequently he sought to emulate precisely this characteristic, which he thought was God's most intrinsic trait, what makes God the Most High, the supremely glorious, the omnipotent. But he was wrong. His reasoning was wrong. In rebelling he does not perceive that he is emulating a nonexistent "God," a simulacrum, a god who is not the true God who created heaven and earth. God does not create the world on a whim, nor does he do so to exhibit his omnipotence before spectators who were created for the express purpose of applauding him. The glory of God that creation (and then, more perfectly Jesus Christ) reveals is, in contrast, the glory of a God who loves because in himself he is Love. In more precise terms, God's glory is not so much that of a God who in creating demonstrates his unlimited power, as that of a God who in bestowing being (agape) begs at the same time from the beloved the *gift* of receiving his gift (eros), revealing in precisely this way his most intrinsic nature, which is Love:<sup>59</sup> the Love through which the Father eternally gives all that he has to the Son, including the power to love him in return by receiving the

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through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:8–11).

59. It is helpful here to recall that the biblical concept of glory (*kabod*) in the Old Testament, before any creative Johannine appropriation of the concept (see section 5 above), indicates precisely the visible-perceptible splendor of the invisible, hidden character of the Thrice-Holy God (Is 6:1ff.). On the manifestation of the Lord's *kabod* in the Old Testament, see Gerhard von Rad, "Kabod-GLORY," in *TDNT* [= *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*], vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 238–47; Claus Westermann, "כבוד *kbd*, to be heavy," in *TLOT* [= *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*], vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 595–602 (4aff.); Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1967), 29–35; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 283–87, 426–29; Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), esp. 138–52, 175–82, 304–37; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology: The Old Covenant*, vol. 6 of *The Glory of the Lord* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 31–66; Jacques Briand, *Dieu dans l'Écriture* (Cerf: Paris, 1992), 44–50; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 2005), B.11.2.1; etc.

gift. God's freedom is not indeterminate power, purely negative freedom, the power of self-determination. On the contrary, God's freedom has always been the self-transcendence of love, the generous communication of all that is his own. The Father, as Athanasius and Hilary already taught,<sup>60</sup> does not generate the Son as someone who could, if he wanted, not do so. In God there is no freedom that precedes love, as though God were *first* pure freedom of self-determination *and then* decided to communicate his being, to become Father. No, God *is* the total self-giving of love (Hilary).<sup>61</sup> And in love the one who takes the initiative, the lover, is not higher than the beloved, the one to whom the gift is destined,<sup>62</sup> since the fulfillment of the gift in which the act of love consists is in equal measure the product of the *fiat* of both lover and beloved. More exactly, it is precisely through receiving that the beloved acquires the power to collaborate with the lover in the mysterious and superabundant fruit of the love that is

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60. Cf. Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 3.66 (PG 26, c. 461); Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 2.6 (CCSL [= *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*] 62, 43; NPNF-2 9:53b-54a). Hilary writes in *De Trinitate* 9.61: "God can never be anything but love, or anything but the Father: and He, Who loves, does not envy; He Who is Father, is wholly and entirely Father. . . . A father is altogether father in all his qualities, to the offspring born of him" (CCSL 62, 440; NPNF-2 9:176b).

61. Balthasar, reflecting on what was already explained by Athanasius and Hilary, astutely writes,

Faith knows from the facts of revelation that the hypostases really exist in their relative opposition, just as it knows from the same facts, and from their ecclesial interpretation, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. Any speculative grasp of the mystery of the identity of both aspects always requires the convergence [*Aufeinanderbewegung*] of two propositions—which *resist every attempt to reduce them to one*. . . .

If the self-giving of the Father to the Son and of both to the Holy Spirit reflects neither an arbitrary choice nor a necessary constraint but God's innermost being, this most intimate nature—however the processions may be distinguished from one another—can in the end *only be love*. (*Truth of God*, vol. 2 of *Theologic*, 133, 136, emphasis added)

62. This obviously includes and presupposes self-possession as its situation. There is no gift of self without possession of self. But in God (as in a human being who has attained perfection) the converse is also true, namely that there is no possession except in the gift of self. The divine Persons *are* eternal and most-pure reciprocal self-donation. See also, for bibliographical notes on the topic, Prosperi, *Al di là della Parola*, 574ff.

given and received, the gushing forth of joy in their hearts. Is this not precisely what the Latin doctrine of the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son (*Filioque*) teaches us? Precisely through the eternal *fiat* to his own filiation, to the Father's own being, the Son receives a share in the power that belongs to the Father: to produce together with him a new Person, the Spirit Paraclete, the Consoler, a witness to the love that is given and received. Is this not what the Church teaches us when she tells us that the world is created by the Father through the Son in the Spirit?<sup>63</sup> The fact that creation is a single act of the one God does not mean that the divine Persons do not take part in this work each according to his own role in the *taxis* (trinitarian order). Thus the Father can only create *through* his two hands (Irenaeus of Lyons), that is, the Son and the Spirit. Conversely, the Son-Word can create only in response to the initiative of the Father.

This brings to light the tragic self-deception of the rebel angel and, along with him, of titanism as such. The anarchist deceives himself not only because he pursues an impossible goal (indeed, his refusal to be dependent always presupposes what he denies). More tragically, he deceives himself because he does not notice that the Creator, in calling him to accept his loving initiative, intended to give him what he ardently desires: to share in the freedom of the divine Persons, that is, in the fruitfulness of love. To put it more precisely, the self-deception of the rebel angel must have consisted in a kind of confusion between nature or essence (*ousia*) and personal or hypostatic freedom. Obviously, no creature can become like God with regard to essence, since in that case it would cease to be itself in order to become God. But this is not just impossible. As Thomas elucidated neatly, it is also *undesirable*, since no entity desires *in actu primo* its own annihilation.<sup>64</sup> Lucifer therefore

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63. The Second Council of Constantinople declares solemnly, "For one is the God and Father *from* whom all things are, one is the Lord Jesus Christ *through* whom all things are, and one the Holy Spirit *in* whom all things are" (DH [= Denzinger-Hünemann], 421, emphasis added).

64. Although it is possible to reach the point of desiring it *in actu secundo*, i.e., as a consequence of the Fall. Moreover, as Dostoevsky lucidly intuited, the authentic anarchist cannot help being seized, sooner or later, by the desire to annihilate himself. See on this topic the fine analysis of the character Kirillov in Romano Guardini, *Dostojevskij: Il mondo religioso* (Brescia, Italy:



must not have desired to become God with respect to his nature. What he craved was to become like God in the exercise of his personal freedom, which in itself is neither erroneous nor impossible. If we consider God's life from the perspective of the act of each Person (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and not from the viewpoint of the unity of substance, then we have to say that each Person creates in communion with the others and receives the power to act *through* and *in dependence on* the others no less than through *his "own" will*. In still more precise terms, in an analogous and nevertheless real sense it is true even in God that the power to create is simultaneously the fruit of *voluntas propria et voluntas alterius* (his own will and the will of an Other), since it is the one (substantial) will of God possessed by the Father and by the Son, each according to his own respective mode of existence. Which means, in other words, that even in God each Person *receives* through another Person no less than through himself the power to create.<sup>65</sup> In God there is no other

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Morcelliana, 1995), 181–18.

65. Someone will say that in God there is (numerically) one will. It all depends on how this numerical unicity is understood. Certainly it is necessary to beware of understanding the threeness of the divine Persons in such a way that numerical unity is not safeguarded. And nevertheless, it is likewise crucial—and required first of all by fidelity to the clear indications that come from Scripture, especially from John's gospel—to safeguard the idea that in the intra-divine life there is real *communio personarum*, which necessarily implies a reciprocal donation of love among the distinct centers of freedom. I cannot see, as it is sometimes argued by Thomist theologians, the reason why such an understanding of the trinitarian mystery would necessarily refute the likewise indispensable tenet of God's simplicity. There is nothing contradictory in the paradoxical character of the statement that in God there is one will and at the same time three wills. This statement does not even sin by anthropomorphism any more than this occurs, for example, in the case of the favorite psychological analogy (mind, knowledge, love) of the Thomist tradition (without thereby denying the value and even the indispensable usefulness of the latter analogy, provided that it is used as an apophatic corrective for the social analogy). On this whole set of problems, cf. Piero Coda, *Dalla Trinità: L'avvento di Dio tra storia e profezia* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2011), 573–83; François Bourassa, "Personne et conscience en théologie trinitaire," *Gregorianum* 55, no. 3–4 (1974): 471–93, 677–720 at 690 and 706, 717–20; François Bourassa, *Questions de théologie trinitaire* (Rome: Presses de l'Université Grégorienne, 1970); Heribert Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person in der Trinität bei der Inkarnation und im Gnadenbund: Ich-Du-Wir* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963); Adrian Walker, "Personal Singularity and the *Communio Personarum*: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas' Doctrine of *Esse Commune*," *Communio: International*

creative power than the fruitfulness of the mutual love between Father and Son—a love in which respect for order (*taxis*) and equality *in gloria* are inseparable.<sup>66</sup> Lucifer certainly could not become a creator in exactly the way in which God is the Creator (i.e., *ex nihilo*) and *as* God. Nevertheless, he was able and destined, like every spiritual creature, to be fruitful and generative in the manner or according to the order in which the Son is. Precisely in agreeing to stand at his own post—that is, in accepting his role as a “second”—he would have become a much greater artist than anything he could have imagined *a priori*. Obedient love for the gift that has been received is what makes the authentic artist—not the anxious desire to be an artist. Is the “sub-creative” work of J. R. R. Tolkien not perhaps the concrete proof of this paradox?<sup>67</sup> The creature does not need to deny his own creatureliness in order to satisfy his desire for divine glory. On the contrary, the more faithfully and actively he stays at his assigned post, the more divinely fruitful he will become, if it is true, as Maximus the Confessor says, that man is destined to become through grace all that God is by nature,<sup>68</sup> and as John of the Cross says, that someone who

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*Catholic Review* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 457–79.

66. For a more in-depth discussion of this topic—i.e., that respect for hierarchy (*taxis*) implies exchange of characteristics proper to each one (*communicatio incommunicabilium*) and vice versa in the *communio personarum* that joins man and woman and (analogously) the divine Persons—I take the liberty of referring to my article: “This Mystery Is Great: Reflections on the Fittingness of the Nuptial Analogy in Trinitarian Theology,” in *Enlightening the Mystery of Man: Gaudium et Spes Fifty Years Later*, ed. Antonio López (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018).

67. See note 2 above.

68. The expression is typical of Maximus the Confessor, who uses it frequently in his writings. See, e.g., *Capita de caritate* 3.25 (edition Ceresas-Gastaldo, 154); *Quaestiones et dubia* 4 (CCSG [= *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca*] 10, 5) and 61 (CCSG 10, 48.8–11); *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 7 (PG 91, 1084 C), 10/34 (PG 91, 1176 A); 21 (PG 91, 1253 D); *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 9 (PG 90, 285 C), 64 (PG 90, 725 C), etc. In a daring passage of the *Ambigua ad Iohannem* (PG 91, 1253 D), Maximus goes so far as to write that “through grace the soul becomes *an icon of the Logos*, or if the expression did not sound so difficult to many people, the Logos himself [*tautòn autò*] through grace, rather than a likeness, having received in it the Lord Himself” (emphasis added). On Maximus’s teaching about *theosis*, see Jean Claude Larchet, *La divinisation de l’homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Cerf, 1996); Norman Russell,

is in Christ receives the power to co-spirate together with him the Holy Spirit.<sup>69</sup> In fact every act of generating beauty, truth, and goodness in which the creature participates is only an assimilation into the immense fruitfulness of the Son's "yes." We see this law realized to an unsurpassable degree of perfection in Mary of Nazareth, the humble and at the same time fruitful handmaid beyond all telling. And we may wonder whether it is not for this reason too that Satan's hatred is unleashed with the utmost violence against her in particular, the "woman clothed with the sun" (Rev 12).

#### 7. "THEY HATED ME WITHOUT CAUSE [ΔΩΡΕΑΝ]"

By way of a conclusion, I would like to turn our attention now to a passage from John's gospel, which, if meditated on attentively, unifies all that has been argued thus far. In John 15:22–25, the Johannine Jesus reflects on the mystery of the unbelief that he has encountered precisely among the most learned and noblest members of his people:

"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father also.

[A] . . . but now they have seen

[νῦν δὲ καὶ ἐώρακασιν]

[B] and hated both me and my Father.

[καὶ μεμισήκασιν καὶ ἐμὲ καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου]

[C] It is to fulfill the word that is written in their law,

[ἀλλ' ἵνα πληρωθῇ ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτῶν γεγραμμένος ὅτι]

[D] 'They hated me without cause.'

[Ἐμίσησάν με δωρεάν].'' (Emphasis added)

Why would men reject the one who is light and life in person? If we are to believe Jesus' word, there is no reason why. Still, if pondered attentively, this same answer might be more profound and meaningful than it seems at first. There are three

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*The Doctrine of Deification in the Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 262–95.

69. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love*, canticle 4, vv. 16–17.

considerations I would like to make in relation to this crucial text.

First, Jesus' insistence that these men have *heard* and *seen* (ἑώρακασιν) makes it quite clear that his enemies have not rejected him because of a tragic "misunderstanding." Rather, they hated him in spite of being fully exposed, so to say, to the splendor of his glory.<sup>70</sup>

Second, Jesus' words in C–D seem to address "in advance" the possible question that the mystery of this hatred might elicit in the disciples. How could any member of God's people hate the man who is God's salvific mercy in person? Apparently, the answer of Jesus is simply that it was written (D).

Third, given the fact that, in John's gospel, Scripture as a rule is not used *just* to prove that things had to happen in the way they did, but rather as a means of highlighting some *deep truth* that comes to light only by comparing figure and fulfillment,<sup>71</sup> one can legitimately wonder whether something of the sort is going on here as well.

To answer this question, let us turn to Psalm 69, which

70. It is useful to note here that the perfect tense of the verb *orao* in the fourth gospel (see Jn 3:11, 3:32, 4:45, 5:37, 6:36, 6:46, 8:38, 9:37, 14:7–9, 15:24, 19:35, 20:18, 25, 29) has a precise, we might say *technical* meaning. It is used in two and only two contexts: (1) to indicate Jesus' uniquely intimate knowledge of the Father, and (2) to denote the vision of Jesus' divine glory. For slightly different interpretations, see Traets, *Voir Jésus*, 45, 57ff.; Ignace de La Potterie, *Studi di Cristologia Giovannea* (Genoa, Italy: Marietti, 1992). According to La Potterie, "the Johannine verb of vision that indicates almost the point of arrival of the development of the 'seeing' motif, is beyond any doubt the perfect tense of *oran*: *eoraka*. It indicates the spiritual vision, which is the mature fruit of the path of faith. . . . The exterior vision has become an interior image and the bodily experience of sight has become spiritual contemplation" (295). La Potterie is certainly correct in suggesting a correlation between *eorakenai* and the highest experience of vision possible: the vision of God's glory. However, he disregards the fact that this experience is not only a prerogative of the mature believer. Two subjects do not fall under the category: first, Jesus as the only one who has seen the Father (Jn 1:18, 3:11, 3:32, 5:37, 8:38); second, the unbelieving Jews, who do not believe *in spite of* having seen (Jn 6:36, 15:24). The association between sin and *having seen* in John 15:24 makes it clear that it is possible to have seen a certain manifestation of Jesus' glory and yet not to believe. What truly qualifies the experience of *eorakenai* is then the object of vision more than the disposition of the subject.

71. On this topic, see my article "The Wine of the Wedding," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 574–605.

not accidentally is the psalm that the fourth gospel quotes or alludes to most frequently (thrice).<sup>72</sup>

To begin with, a close reading of the text shows a two-fold peculiarity of this psalm compared to the other psalms associated in the New Testament with the Lord's Passion. First, the suffering of the Lord's servant is due here to the hatred of the very brethren the Lord has sent him to (Ps 69:8–9). Second, the people's hostility against the man of God is caused here precisely by his activity as God's prophet or agent (Ps 69:10). The psalmist was moved by nothing but zealous love for God and his house (Ps 69:9). But the response to the display of this love was rejection and hatred.

All this, I would suggest, makes clear the reason (or at least one of the reasons) why the fourth evangelist is particularly attracted to *this* psalm: as a matter of fact, no other psalm highlights more the paradox of a pure love that is received with inexplicably massive hatred:

More in number than the hairs of my head  
 [ἐπληθύνθησαν ὑπὲρ τὰς τρίχας τῆς κεφαλῆς μου]  
 are those who hate me *without cause*;  
 [οἱ μισοῦντές με δωρεάν]  
 mighty are those who would destroy me,  
 [ἐκραταιώθησαν οἱ ἐχθροί μου]  
 those who attack me with lies [i.e., unjustly]  
 [οἱ ἐκδιώκοντές με ἀδίκως]. (Ps 69:4, emphasis added)

But there is more. Let us now zoom in on the adverb that concludes Jesus' quote. It is intriguing to note that the adverb *δωρεάν*, which in Ps 68:5 (LXX) [= Ps 69:4, RSV-CE, 2nd ed.] designates the injustice of the psalmist's brethren, evocatively has the same root as the word *doron*, gift (cf. Jn 4:10). Even more intriguing is the fact that in the other New Testament writings, the same adverb is used most often (five times as opposed to twice) to indicate the utterly *gratuitous* character of divine or godlike generosity (Mt 10:8; Rom 3:24; 2 Cor 11:7; Rev 21:6, 22:17). In Romans 3:24, in particular, the adverb emphasizes that the believer receives redemption through Christ as a gift. Instead of punishing sinners as they deserved, God gave away his Son in or-

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72. Cf. Jn 2:17, 19:28–29.

der to save them: “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift [δωρεάν], through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood” (Rom 3:23–25).

I would suggest that this other, *toto coelo* (utterly) different usage of δωρεάν provides the background we need to fully appreciate the meaning of the Johannine Jesus’ appropriation of the words of Psalm 69. Is there not a certain (partial) likeness between the gratuitous character of a disinterested gift and the purposeless refusal to receive a gift? In more precise words, is it not the case that in rejecting God’s gratuitous gift randomly and without reason (δωρεάν), what one is doing is precisely aping the sovereign freedom of God’s giving?

If this is correct, we may dare to say, borrowing Dionysius’s categories, that the sinister lure of a “no” that is lucidly said in response to God’s lavish giving and even forgiving (cf. Mozart’s “Don Giovanni”) comes from the fact that the unmerited character (δωρεάν) of rejection *and* the unmerited character (δωρεάν) of God’s gratuitous giving *can* be seen as similar as long as they are both denials of justice—if by justice we mean giving someone their due (*dare cuique suum*). No doubt the denials are not to be understood as equivalent. The “rejection” of the gift is a denial by privation (*kata steresin*), while God’s giving (in creation and redemption) is a denial by superabundance (*kat’hyperochen*). In saying “no” to God’s gifts, the creature gives “less” than what is due to the recipient of his “no.” In contrast, in saying “yes” to the still nonexistent and later fallen creature, God gives more than what is due to the recipient of his gifts. The dissimilarity is evident and should suffice to persuade the creature that he is not attaining his goal in trying to mimic God by way of his denial. The point I am trying to make, however, is that a certain *appearance* of likeness exists between the two acts of freedom—one that can make it appealing for the creature to deny the truth deliberately in a desperate attempt to emulate God’s freedom.

Nowhere does this mimicking character of pure rejection come more clearly to the fore than in the Johannine account of the confrontation between Jesus’ last initiative of love toward Judas the betrayer and Judas’s own freedom. As is often noted, it is hardly a coincidence that Satan enters Judas *immediately* after

the Lord gives him the dipped morsel as the ultimate sign of his enduring love.

So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. (Jn 13:26–27)

Confronted with the ultimate expression of God's gratuitous love, the very essence of the diabolical comes to light: *indignant refusal* to receive life as a gift of God (*doron*) because of one's desire to be like him. The question is whether this way of making oneself like God is based on an accurate understanding of God's freedom.

Interestingly, there is one last New Testament usage of the adverb δωρεάν that we have not yet considered. It is found in Galatians 2:21, where it designates the "failure" of God's gift of grace when it is not received in faith:

*I do not nullify the grace of God; [οὐκ ἄθετῶ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ] for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose [ἄρα Χριστὸς δωρεάν ἀπέθανεν]. (Emphasis added)*

The lack of reception turns the gift into a "failure," into a "failed gift." Conversely this means that any gratuitous "giving away" which is not ordered to the reception of what is given is only a heretical—let us not forget that, etymologically speaking, heresy implies *partiality*—counterfeit of God's way of giving. It is true that God "gives away" his own Son gratuitously (δωρεάν in the sense of "for nothing"). Yet this does not mean his giving is purposeless (δωρεάν in the sense of "to no purpose," "randomly"). For this giving is the giving of a lover who desires the completion of his gift through the beloved's act of reception. The rebelling creature, then, is inexcusable (cf. Jn 15:22) both with regard to God the Creator (in the devil's case) and with regard to God the Redeemer (in the case of those who rejected Jesus), not only because the creature presumes to see more about God than he actually sees/knows, but also because, by unilaterally absolutizing the more impressive "side of the coin," he ends up seeing less about himself and his own dignity than he would see if he had the patience and humility to consider the whole picture more carefully: "Do not judge by

appearances, but judge with right judgment” (Jn 7:24).—*Translated by Michael J. Miller.* □

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