

THE LOGIC OF CHRISTIAN HUMANISM¹

• Peter M. Candler, Jr. •

As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”
And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”
—Luke 19:37–40

1. Introduction

On a low hill above the northwestern corner of the ancient *agora* of Athens, humbler and less conspicuous than the majestic Parthenon, sits the most well-preserved surviving piece of classical architecture in modern Greece: the Hephaisteion, a fifth-century BC temple to the god of fire. Its vertiginous and perpendicular lines, the graceful spaces of light which its angles cut and disclose, are a remarkable and singularly fortunate testimony to the architectural and aesthetic genius of the Greeks.

A couple of miles east of here stands what the Italian Renaissance architect Sebastiano Serlio called “the most beautiful, the most whole, and the best considered of Rome’s ancient

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buildings,”² the Pantheon, built circa 125 AD, formerly a temple devoted to the ancient Roman gods and now a major tourist attraction.

What the Hephaisteion and the Pantheon hold in common is that they have survived the ravages of time and war at least in part because they were or are sites consecrated to the worship and adoration of the Christian God. The Hephaisteion served as the parish church of St. George from the seventh until the nineteenth century; the Pantheon, also consecrated in the seventh century, is now known as Santa Maria dei Martiri. The Parthenon too was consecrated to the Virgin Mary in the Roman period, but in 1687 during the Ottoman empire, it fell apart, thanks to Turkish gunpowder and Venetian mortar. It is perhaps ironically fitting that what remains relatively intact is the temple to the god of the infernal arts, under whose aegis the neighboring temple to the goddess of wisdom and patroness of Athens stands in ruins. Wisdom has succumbed to technology. Hephaestus has subdued Athena.

This would be a fitting illustration of the law of modernity, but there are of course exceptions to this. Not far from this spot, in fact just a few yards from the Pantheon, upon the site of the ancient pagan temple to the goddess Minerva (Athena) stands one of this city’s few, but most brilliant, expressions of the Gothic architectural sensibility, the Santa Maria sopra Minerva—since the middle ages the home church to the Roman Dominican community—which famously features the shrine of Catherine of Siena and the Carafa chapel dedicated to Saint Thomas Aquinas and adorned with historic frescoes depicting scenes from his life by Fra Filippino Lippi, not least of which is the celebrated “Triumph of Thomas Aquinas (over the Averroists).”

The Minerva is also rightly regarded as a locus of the Italian Renaissance in letters: during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it hosted a series of panegyrics to the Common Doctor, the most famous of which is Lorenzo Valla’s *Encomium Sancti Thomae*, delivered 7 March 1457. When Paul Oskar Kristeller wrote about it in 1965, he described this genre of “orations or eulogies delivered

²Sebastiano Serlio, *Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospetiva*, book III, f. 50r; quoted in Paul Davies, David Hemsoll, and Mark Wilson Jones, “The Pantheon: Triumph of Rome or Triumph of Compromise?” *Art History* 10, no. 2 (June 1987): 133.

in honor of the Saint” as “almost unknown to historians.”³ John W. O’Malley has shown that a number of panegyrics besides Valla’s survive from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He examines fourteen of them, six of which were delivered in the Minerva on 7 March.⁴ They were delivered as part of a special Mass each year on Thomas’s feast day, and were generally given “by a layman or religious invited by the Fathers for the occasion, rather than by a Dominican from the convent.”⁵

Such instances of Christianity’s transformative preservation of paganism are manifold in this city, from Trajan’s Column (now topped by a statue of St. Peter), the sight of which prompted Pope Gregory I in the sixth century to pray for the soul of the honored emperor—an event commemorated memorably by Dante in *Purgatorio* X—to the very tomb of Peter himself, part of an ancient pagan necropolis upon which the present basilica, completed in 1626, is built.

It could be plausibly argued that in fact Christianity uniquely preserves the greatness of humanity—even in its unrealized and futile aspirations. Of course, this presupposes that the Christian dogma has its own account of what exactly constitutes that greatness—and there is no shortage of critics who, though of invariably lesser stature and integrity than Friedrich Nietzsche, argue that its understanding of human greatness is perverse, the consummate expression of a will-to-power ordered to a denial and not an affirmation of life.

Such criticisms are not to be dismissed lightly—especially when they come from Nietzsche himself, whom, despite his apparent lack of taste, every Christian is obligated to hold in high regard. Nor, for that matter, are such criticisms to be proffered lightly, as is all too often the case at the moment.

³Paul Oskar Kristeller, “Thomism and the Italian Thought of the Renaissance,” in *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning. Three Essays by Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Edward P. Mahoney (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974), 60. The essay was originally a lecture delivered in 1965, and published as *Le Thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance* (Montreal: Institut d’Etudes Médiévales, and Paris: Vrin, 1967).

⁴John W. O’Malley, “Some Renaissance Panegyrics of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1974): 174–92.

⁵Kristeller, “Thomism and the Italian Thought of the Renaissance,” 61.

On the other hand, one cannot deny the overwhelming beneficence the orthodox, catholic Christian faith has bestowed upon human culture in its attempts to preserve what it perceives to be best within it.⁶

Now all of this seems ripe for a purely sociological explanation. But the examples I have cited are instances of a particularly Christian conception of the world—call it of reason in its grandeur—that no other intellectual or religious culture has been able to provide. There is, to my meager knowledge, no analogue to this phenomenon in other religious cultures of the world, not to mention philosophical or brutally political ones. Modernity, for its part, is simply not a candidate here. Keeping vigil at the cult of Hephaestus, its law has been either destruction and devastation in the name of an illusory progress, where the past is simply something to be overcome, or more rightly over-paved, or an illusory “preservation” in the form of the museum.

Now it could also be argued that a kind of borrowing is characteristic of every age and culture, and no doubt that is to some extent true. But what is peculiar to modernity from its inception is its self-conscious “liberation” from tradition. If anything, much modern thought tends to think of such borrowing as a form of intellectual slavery. But Christianity—which, it must be said, is neither modern, medieval, nor ancient—does articulate an ontology according to which such borrowing is not only not slavery but a function of providence, according to which, as Aquinas says, “God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature.”⁷ And those natures, as given and created by God, have some share in his own existence, and therefore all bear an analogical relationship both to God and to one another.⁸

Of course, one could cite instances where the arrival of Christianity was less hospitable to the ancient cultures, where it

⁶For this reason I am not sure that one can really forgive Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell’s programmatic destruction of monastic life in Britain—which is all too politely and English-ly euphemized as a “dissolution” or even a “suppression.”

⁷Thomas Aquinas, ST I, 1, 1, *resp.* I have discussed this notion of “borrowing,” with special attention to St. Augustine, in more detail in chapter three of my *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction, or Reading Scripture Together on the Path to God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁸I merely allude here to what is fundamental to this ontology, namely, an account of participation, *theosis*, and the *analogia entis*.

destroyed rather than saved, leveled rather than elevated. But I think that art historians and anthropologists would be hard pressed to deny that these were more the exception than the rule. And yet, the popular imagination tends simultaneously to hold two contradictory opinions: on the one hand, that Christianity simply co-opted pagan culture for its own purposes, in an act of unparalleled marketing savvy and opportunism; on the other, that Christianity, in a sustained act of *ressentiment*, obliterated every vestige of human culture which, in obedience to the first commandment, it perceived as idolatry.

Take Pope Gregory himself as an example. The Venerable Bede records that Gregory, writing in 601 AD to Abbot Melitus about to depart for Britain, says that “we have been giving careful thought to the affairs of the English, and have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols among that people should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well-built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God.”⁹

In this same spirit, the rites of consecration which developed in the seventh century and following sometimes involved “a kind of baptism of the stone structure that enclosed the living Church,” using a special mixture of water, ashes and wine known as “Gregorian water,” owing to the Pope’s alleged authorship of the “Gregorian Sacramentary.”¹⁰ Now it may be possible to detect a whiff of opportunism in Gregory’s exhortation, but, according to Josef Jungmann, “[t]here is something to be learned from the fact that in the consecration ceremony . . . church and altar are ‘baptized’ and

⁹Bede the Venerable, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price and rev. R.E. Latham (London: Penguin, 1990) I, 30, 92.

¹⁰Cf. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 77, 153ff. Cf. also Louis Bouyer, *Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe, S.J., *Liturgical Studies* 7 (Notre Dame: Notre Dame, 1963), 187–78; Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: A. & C. Black, 1945), 570–73.

‘confirmed’ almost like human beings; they are sprinkled on all sides with holy water and are anointed with holy oil.”¹¹

What is to be learnt from this, it seems to me, is—beneath whatever pragmatic designs this may involve—a more basic theological impetus.¹² That much at least should be obvious, but this sense that an intimation of the glory of God still somehow subsists in the stones is a function of an exclusively Christian dogma, to wit, that in Jesus of Nazareth God himself assumed human flesh and redemptively consummated it. The central mystery of the Incarnation is the logic of a properly Christian humanism,¹³ the articulation of which mystery, however provisional and unsatisfying, is and has been the objective of every theological utterance, church council, etc.

Let me be even more precise: a well-conceived Christian humanism takes as its operative principle a saying of Gregory of Nazianzus, who, in a letter to Cledonius, writes,

If anyone has put his trust in Him as a Man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation,

¹¹Josef A. Jungmann, S.J., *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, vol. 1, trans. Francis A. Brunner (Allen, Tx.: Christian Classics, 1986), 254.

¹²Janet Soskice, “Resurrection and the New Jerusalem,” in *Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45: “the Christians are, each one, to be living stones, each one distinct but comprising together the great building whose foundation is Christ.”

¹³There is a variety of ways in which one speaks of “humanism,” such as, among others: 1) humanism as a philosophical affirmation of the human and denial of the supernatural and religious (atheist humanism of Nietzsche, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, et al., but in more banal forms like various Humanist associations around the world; Paul Kurtz, founder and chairman of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, formerly the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), the Council for Secular Humanism, the Center for Inquiry and Prometheus Books); 2) humanism as religious but not really (Greg Epstein and the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard); 3) humanism as opposed to scholasticism (Erasmus, Valla); 4) humanism in the sense of *belles lettres* (Leo Strauss, etc.).

or clothe the Savior only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity. For if His Manhood is without soul, even the Arians admit this, that they may attribute His Passion to the Godhead, as that which gives motion to the body is also that which suffers.¹⁴

The interesting point here is that the background to Gregory's maxim is the Apollinarian heresy, according to which God assumed a human body but not a human mind. Instead, the theory goes, the human mind was replaced by the divine *logos*. That is, in the human Jesus, the divine *logos* acts as the rational element in place of an ordinary human mind. This, for Gregory and the other Cappadocians, was inadequate to the notion of Jesus as fully human and fully divine as articulated in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.¹⁵

The Apollinarian option is for Gregory unacceptable because of two factors: 1) it denies the full humanity of Christ; and 2) it also denies the human nature of human beings. Therefore the whole of humanity is assumed by God in Christ, and therefore saved. Hence Gregory's maxim: "what is not assumed is not healed." I want to argue that this maxim is the logic of every properly Christian humanism.¹⁶

¹⁴Gregory of Nazianzus, Letter (101) to Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius. For a recent English translation, see St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, ed. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 155–66.

¹⁵All of the other aphorisms to which one could attribute equal significance—such as *gratia non tollit sed perficit naturam* or "God became man in order that man might become God" or *omnia intendunt assimilari Deo* are derived from this basic conviction: that the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity takes human nature into God himself, and perfects it without destroying its irreducible particularity and contingency. The Hephasteion and the Parthenon—and especially their survival—are quite simply unintelligible apart from this.

¹⁶I will leave aside the complicated issue of Renaissance humanism in its various forms, the quality and character of whose debt to the patristic and medieval understanding of humanity as I am portraying it here is deeply complicated, multivalent and demanding of great finesse. In any event, it would be false to attribute to the Renaissance *per se* a "rediscovery" of the "human." What passes for "Christian humanism," whether in the fifteenth century or in the twentieth, is frequently *both* insufficiently Christian *and* insufficiently humanistic. What I am suggesting here is that only by a properly theological account of humanity in light of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan "definition" of the Incarnation can "Christian

2. The Basilica of St. Peter

Allow me to cite an additional architectural instance, even closer to where we sit today: in front of the Basilica of St. Peter, in the piazza designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini stands an Egyptian obelisk dating from the thirteenth century BC that in the first century AD stood in the center of the Circus of Nero, just adjacent to the present site of the basilica. It was in this circus where the apostle Peter was executed by the Neronian regime. Moved to the Piazza San Pietro in 1586 by Pope Sixtus V (before the present design by Bernini was constructed),¹⁷ it was very likely the last thing St. Peter beheld in this life before his crucifixion in c. 64 AD.

According to Bernini's original designs (which were themselves not really original to Bernini but the products of "counter-proposals"),¹⁸ the plan for the piazza (an idea going back

humanism" be considered truly Christian and therefore truly human. Of course there are even problematic forms of such a humanism which nevertheless make their appeal to the hypostatic union central. But it would be salutary in this respect to think of a properly Christian humanism as avoiding a kind of Arianism on the one hand, and a kind of Docetism on the other—both of which errors deny in opposite ways the fullest sense in which God gives himself to humanity, which Nicea and Constantinople sought to preserve against any form of divine "self-hoarding." Parsing out the ways in which the many and varied forms of "Christian humanism" attend to this central doctrine would be a long and arduous task, and would likely resist any easy generalization.

¹⁷When Pope Sixtus V had it moved from its position south of the basilica to its present, more prominent, location in the middle of the piazza in 1586, however, it was stripped of its associations with Caesar: the sphere was opened, exorcised and found not to contain any ashes at all. The sphere was replaced with a bronze cross, and a new inscription was added to the base of the obelisk with the words 'ECCE CRUX DOMINI FUGITE PARTES ADVERSAE.' From its secular origins as an instrument for measuring time, it had become an instrument of the Counter-Reformation" (Peter Mason, "A Dragon Tree in the Garden of Eden: A Case Study of the Mobility of Objects and Their Images in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of the History of Collections* 18, no. 2 (2006): 169–85. See E. Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile*, vol. 1: *The Obelisks of Rome* (Copenhagen, 1968). For the transfer of the obelisk to the Piazza San Pietro in 1586 see, for instance, C. Hibbert, *Rome. The Biography of a City* (Harmondsworth, 1987), 175–78.

¹⁸See especially Rudolf Wittkower, "A Counter-Project to Bernini's 'Piazza di San Pietro,'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 3, no. 1, 2 (October 1939–January 1940): 88–106. See alternative proposals for the paving of the piazza, Franco Borsi, *Bernini*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), 79. For the open arms plan, see also T. A. Marder, *Bernini and the Art of Architecture*

to Pope Nicholas V) was intended to represent the open arms of the Church. In Bernini's own words, from a memorandum probably written in 1658, he likens the colonnades to the arms of Mother Church, "which embrace Catholics to reinforce their belief, heretics to reunite them with the church, and Agnostics to enlighten them with the true faith."¹⁹ The central oval of the piazza is divided up into eight equal sections, as a pie. Seen from above, the top is to the north, and the piazza becomes a giant sundial, in which the cross literally marks the time.

Hanno-Walter Krufft suggests that the source of inspiration for Bernini's oval design of the piazza may have come from the original design of the Circus of Nero itself, which he encountered through artistic reconstructions.²⁰ "The Neronian Circus, being the site of St Peter's martyrdom, becomes through Bernini's colonnades a gesture on the part of the Church which . . . opens in this way her motherly arms to mankind."²¹

Bernini had at one point entertained the idea of relocating Trajan's Column to a square in front of a planned papal palace, but this was never realized. But the column itself did figure in some proposals for St. Peter's, not least of which was a plan for the construction, on top of the tomb of Peter, "the realistic image of the mystical ship of the Church. In the bow of the ship appears the figure of St. Paul, while St. Peter is the pilot with the tiller under his arm. In front of St. Peter is the Cathedra, the throne of the Popes, while above the tomb of the Apostles is the papal altar, surmounted by a huge crucifix on the upright shaft of which the whole passion is shown in the same way as the reliefs on Trajan's column. This crucifix forms the mast of the ship on which the sail is fixed."²² (An illustration of this proposal survives in an engraving by Mattheus Greuter in 1623.²³) This is a vivid illustration of an analogy from St. Ambrose, who describes the Church as a bark which, "in the full

(New York: Abbeville, 1998), 141.

¹⁹Quoted in Wittkower, "A Counter-Project," 103.

²⁰Hanno-Walter Krufft, "The Origin of the Oval in Bernini's Piazza S. Pietro," *The Burlington Magazine* 121, no. 921 (December 1979): 796–801.

²¹*Ibid.*, 801.

²²Wittkower, "A Counter-Project," 105.

²³(Rome: Bibl. Vittorio Emanuele II, Fondi minori), 3808.

sail of the Lord's cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world."²⁴

Now all of this belongs to the peculiar manner in which Christianity remembers the dead—not just its own saints but those of the ages before, and even after, its own advent—like Trajan who was, in Gregory's view, though a pagan and no special friend of Christians, capable of acts of mercy that were more recognizably Christian than pagan. Rome is literally built upon the dead, and yet it is the "Eternal City." This later appellation is more fitting given Rome's peculiar place in Christian history. It is precisely because Rome is a City of the Dead that it is eternal. Present Italian politics notwithstanding, Rome is a particularly poignant expression of what Chesterton called "the democracy of the dead": here more than perhaps anywhere, to paraphrase Faulkner, the dead are not really past; they are not even dead. The Baroque architectural projects of Bernini in the Rome of Alexander VII—to cite just one example—are evidence of the sense in which an explicitly Christian humanism in the arts restored, or even resurrected, dead architectural forms from the Greeks and early Romans. This was not done in a naively triumphalistic way but in a manner that preserved the glories of the pagans.

Yet the triumphalist danger is never entirely absent. This is inevitable, but the Christian triumph is not a Dresden-style conquest but a kenotic consummation, a grace which does not destroy but elevates and perfects. If, as Paul says to the Corinthians, Christ's passion is a victory, it is a victory not *over* humanity but *for* it. So yes, Christianity has an irreducibly triumphal air about it, but this is not the all-too-modern triumph of *Blitzkrieg* or "shock and awe" but more akin to a bloodless revolution—or perhaps better, a conversion. Yet this entire notion has provoked suspicions of colonialism in some quarters:

the time for one-way traffic in the meeting of cultures and religions is over, and if there are still remnants of such a colonialistic attitude, they are dying out. Neither monologue nor conquest is any longer tenable. The "spolia aegyptiorum" mentality is today no longer possible (because the Egyptians are alive and are also children of God) nor is it in any way justifiable. To think that one people, one culture, one religion has got the

²⁴Ambrose, *De virginitate* 18.8. Cf. also *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 845.

right to dominate all the rest belongs to a past period in world history. Our contemporary degree of consciousness and our present-day conscience, East and West, would find such a pretension utterly untenable.²⁵

To my mind, this gets the whole notion of the *spolia* drastically wrong. It is not colonialism, though to be sure it may have been misunderstood in such a way in the past, but rather a kind of benevolence.²⁶ The Church, of course, is not, at least in this sense, “one people” or “one culture,” though it could be argued to its shame, that, given the omnipresence of schism, it is not even “one religion.” The logic of the *spolia* is not that of a one-way traffic or a monologue.

As the Italian Aristotelian Antonio Cittadini once said, *Thomae aufer, mutus fiet Aristoteles*.²⁷ This is really a particularization of a more general claim: *Christum aufer, mutus fiet mundus*—apart from Christ, the world cannot speak to us.

A good example of triumphalism is the eighteenth-century “transfer” of the Elgin Marbles to the British Museum. This is, I think, a gesture entirely different than, say, the transfer of the obelisk of Nero’s circus to St. Peter’s Square. In the first case, it is a question of the exercise of imperial privilege which is not only of questionable legality, but also of a dubious political philosophy informed by a perverse voluntarism.²⁸ The preservation of the

²⁵Raimundo Pannikar, “The Category of Growth in Comparative Religion: A Critical Self-Examination,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 66, no. 1 (January 1973): 113–40; 120.

²⁶My reading here ought not to be read as a wholesale dismissal of post-colonialist criticism. On the contrary, the account I offer here provides, I think, the basis for a more substantive and vigorous critique of those forms of cultural theft than perhaps standard accounts may do. In this respect, what is considered today “triumphalist colonialism” would represent the very antithesis of the kind of humanism of which I am offering an account. For an account of such activities and their theological justification in the Americas, see Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: the Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992). I am grateful to Angel Mendez for discussions on this point.

²⁷Quoted in Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 306.

²⁸Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, ST II-II, 66, 5 ad 1: “With regard to treasure-trove

obelisk, on the other hand, is as literal an expression of the *spolia aegyptiorum* as one might imagine, according to which the unique grandeur of humanity is uniquely proclaimed by the Christian evangel.²⁹ Of course, there are ten other Egyptian obelisks scattered

a distinction must be made. For some there are that were never in anyone's possession, for instance precious stones and jewels, found on the seashore, and such the finder is allowed to keep [*Dig. I, viii, De divis. rerum: Inst. II, i, De rerum divis.*]. The same applies to treasure hidden underground long since and belonging to no man, except that according to civil law the finder is bound to give half to the owner of the land, if the treasure trove be in the land of another person [*Inst. II, i, 39: Cod. X, xv, De Thesauris*]. Hence in the parable of the Gospel (Mt 13:44) it is said of the finder of the treasure hidden in a field that he bought the field, as though he purposed thus to acquire the right of possessing the whole treasure. On the other hand the treasure-trove may be nearly in someone's possession: and then if anyone take it with the intention, not of keeping it but of returning it to the owner who does not look upon such things as unappropriated, he is not guilty of theft. In like manner if the thing found appears to be unappropriated, and if the finder believes it to be so, although he keep it, he does not commit a theft [*Inst. II, i, 47*]. In any other case the sin of theft is committed [*Dig. XLI, i, De acquirend, rerum dominio, 9: Inst. II, i, 48*]: wherefore Augustine says in a homily (Serm. clxxviii; *De Verb. Apost.*): 'If thou hast found a thing and not returned it, thou hast stolen it' (*Dig. xiv, 5, can. Si quid invenisti*)."

²⁹Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," in *Explorations in Theology*, vol 1: *The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 184–85: "The early medieval thinkers in the West, under the aegis of Augustine, did not depart from this basic concept. Anselm, himself abbot, bishop, and doctor of the Church, knew no other canon of truth than the unity of knowledge and life. The same may be said of Bede, Bernard, and Peter Damian. But as theology increasingly took on a 'scholastic' form, and Aristotelianism burst in like an elemental force, the naive unity hitherto accepted was gravely shaken. No one would think of denying that the gain in clarity, insight, and mastery of the entire field was enormous. More resoundingly than in the time of the Fathers, who, almost as a matter of course, achieved eminence in the schools of antiquity, was the jubilation over the *spolia Aegyptiorum* repeated. The mood which fastened on Christian thinkers was like the intoxication of victors after a battle, at the sight of booty far beyond their expectations.

"The booty in this case, however, was primarily philosophical, and only indirectly theological. Philosophy began to emerge as a special discipline alongside theology, with its own concept of philosophical truth, which was perfectly correct in its own sphere, and could lay no claim to the superior content of revealed truth. *Adaequatio intellectus ad rem* [conformity of the mind to reality]: this definition envisaged, primarily, only the theoretical side of truth. The intimate connection was seen, and indeed emphasized, between the true and the good as the transcendental properties of the one being, but it was looked at more from the human standpoint, in the mutual presupposition of intellect and will (ST I, 16, 4

throughout Rome, not the least (but indeed the shortest) of which is Bernini's famous "Pulcino," which stands in front of the Minerva on the back of an elephant.

There is not space here to discuss the ways in which the notion of the *spolia Aegyptiorum* has been treated in Christian Tradition; but it finds its scriptural basis in at least two principal sources for this idea: Exodus 3:20–22³⁰ and 12:29–36,³¹ which is also linked to the image of the beautiful captive in Deuteronomy 21.³² These pericopes are much discussed in the Fathers, from Clement

and ad 2), than in their objective mutual inclusion, or real identity."

³⁰"And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty. But every woman shall borrow of her neighbor, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians."

³¹"And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men. And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians."

³²Dt 21:10–13: "When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house, and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife." On this motif, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1: *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 211–24.

of Alexandria,³³ Origen,³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa,³⁵ Augustine³⁶ and the

³³Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I, 17: “But among the lies, the false prophets also told some true things . . . Nothing withstands God: nothing opposes Him: seeing He is Lord and omnipotent . . . There is then in philosophy, though stolen as the fire by Prometheus, a slender spark, capable of being fanned into flame, a trace of wisdom and an impulse from God. Well, be it so that ‘the thieves and robbers’ are the philosophers among the Greeks, who from the Hebrew prophets before the coming of the Lord received fragments of the truth, not with full knowledge, and claimed these as their own teachings, disguising some points, treating others sophistically by their ingenuity, and discovering other things, for perchance they had ‘the spirit of perception.’”

³⁴Origen, Letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, 393–94. The passage continues:

“For from the things which the children of Israel took from the Egyptians the vessels in the holy of holies were made,—the ark with its lid, and the Cherubim, and the mercy-seat, and the golden coffer, where was the manna, the angels’ bread. These things were probably made from the best of the Egyptian gold. An inferior kind would be used for the solid golden candlestick near the inner veil, and its branches, and the golden table on which were the pieces of shewbread, and the golden censer between them. And if there was a third and fourth quality of gold, from it would be made the holy vessels; and the other things would be made of Egyptian silver. For when the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt, they gained this from their dwelling there, that they had no lack of such precious material for the utensils of the service of God. And of the Egyptian raiment were probably made all those things which, as the Scripture mentions, needed sewed and embroidered work, sewed with the wisdom of God, the one to the other, that the veils might be made, and the inner and the outer courts. And why should I go on, in this untimely digression, to set forth how useful to the children of Israel were the things brought from Egypt, which the Egyptians had not put to a proper use, but which the Hebrews, guided by the wisdom of God, used for God’s service? Now the sacred Scripture is wont to represent as an evil the going down from the land of the children of Israel into Egypt, indicating that certain persons get harm from sojourning among the Egyptians, that is to say, from meddling with the knowledge of this world, after they have subscribed to the law of God, and the Israelitish service of Him. Ader at least, the Idumæan; so long as he was in the land of Israel, and had not tasted the bread of the Egyptians, made no idols. It was when he fled from the wise Solomon, and went down into Egypt, as it were flying from the wisdom of God, and was made a kinsman of Pharaoh by marrying his wife’s sister, and begetting a child, who was brought up with the children of Pharaoh, that he did this. Wherefore, although he did return to the land of Israel, he returned only to divide the people of God, and to make them say to the golden calf, ‘These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up from the land of Egypt.’

“And I may tell you from my experience, that not many take from Egypt only the useful, and go away and use it for the service of God; while Ader the Idumæan has many brethren. These are they who, from their Greek studies, produce heretical notions, and set them up, like the golden calf, in Bethel, which signifies

medieval theologians, who often read the passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy alongside John 10:7–10.³⁷ Aquinas, “who belonged

‘God’s house.’ In these words also there seems to me an indication that they have set up their own imaginations in the Scriptures, where the word of God dwells, which is called in a figure Bethel. The other figure, the word says, was set up in Dan. Now the borders of Dan are the most extreme, and nearest the borders of the Gentiles, as is clear from what is written in Joshua, the son of Nun. Now some of the devices of these brethren of Ader, as we call them, are also very near the borders of the Gentiles.”

³⁵Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, II, 115.

³⁶Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), II, 144–47, pp. 125–27. The first ellipses replaces this: “which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel, in order to make better use of them, surreptitiously claimed for themselves (they did this not on their own authority but at God’s command, and the Egyptians in their ignorance actually gave them the things of which they had made poor use.” The passage concludes: “This is exactly what many good and faithful Christians have done. We can see, can we not, the amount of gold, silver, and clothing with which Cyprian, that most attractive writer and most blessed martyr, was laden when he left Egypt; is not the same true of Lactantius, and Victorinus, of Optatus, and Hilary, to say nothing of people still alive, and countless Greek scholars? This is what had been done earlier by Moses himself, of whom it is written that he was trained in ‘all the wisdom of the Egyptians.’ Pagan society, riddled with superstition, would never have given to all these men the arts which it considered useful—least of all at a time when it was trying to shake off the yoke of Christ and persecuting Christians—if it had suspected that they would be adapted to the purpose of worshiping the one God, by whom the worship of idols would be eradicated. But they did give their gold and silver and clothing to God’s people as it left Egypt, little knowing that the things they were giving away would be put back into the service of Christ. The event narrated in Exodus was certainly a figure, and this is what it foreshadowed. (I say this without prejudice to any other interpretation of equal or greater importance.)”

See also Serm. xxxii, *de Temp.*: “Before He uttered human words in human flesh, He received the strength of Damascus, i.e., the riches which Damascus vaunted (for in riches the first place is given to gold). They themselves were the spoils of Samaria. Because Samaria is taken to signify idolatry; since this people, having turned away from the Lord, turned to the worship of idols. Hence these were the first spoils which the child took from the domination of idolatry.”

³⁷“Then said Jesus unto them again, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.’”

to the family of those who followed Origen and Augustine,”³⁸ sums up this tradition of interpreting the *spolia* as an instance of just restoration, not theft:

It is no theft for a man to take another’s property either secretly or openly by order of a judge who has commanded him to do so, because it becomes his due by the very fact that it is adjudicated to him by the sentence of the court. Hence still less was it a theft for the Israelites to take away the spoils of the Egyptians at the command of the Lord, Who ordered this to be done on account of the ill-treatment accorded to them by the Egyptians without any cause: wherefore it is written significantly (Wis 10:19): “The just took the spoils of the wicked.”³⁹

“In this respect,” writes de Lubac, “as happens to him so often, Saint Thomas is the simple and faithful echo, right down to the smallest detail, of a long tradition.”⁴⁰

3. *The logic of Christian humanism*

I noted above that Christianity does presume there to be, first of all, something called “human beings”—which presumption is perhaps a little scandalous in some circles, I realize—and that there is a peculiar place among the creatures of the world for this one in particular. Consider how Gregory of Nyssa, commenting on the first creation narrative in Genesis, describes this uniqueness in *On the Making of Man*:

while the world, great as it is, and its parts, are laid as an elemental foundation for the formation of the universe, the creation is,

³⁸de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* I, p. 221.

³⁹ST II-II 66, 5 ad 1. Similarly, *In 1 Cor.*, c. 1, lect. 3., in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* I, 421: “He makes use of the wisdom of the Word. Once the fundamentals of the faith have been taken into account, if he should find anything true in the doctrines of the philosophers, he places it in the service of faith. For this reason Augustine says in *De Doctrina Christiana* that if the philosophers have made any statements that can be reconciled to the faith, not only should these statements not be an object of fear, but they should be claimed from them for our own use on the grounds that they are in possession of them unjustly.”

⁴⁰de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis* I, 221.

so to say, made offhand by the Divine power, existing at once on His command, while counsel precedes the making of man . . . for it says, “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of the heaven, and the cattle, and all the earth.

O marvelous! a sun is made, and no counsel precedes; a heaven likewise; and to these no single thing in creation is equal. So great a wonder is formed by a word alone, and the saying indicates neither when, nor how, nor any such detail. So too in all particular cases, the æther, the stars, the intermediate air, the sea, the earth, the animals, the plants,—all are brought into being with a word, while only to the making of man does the Maker of all draw near with circumspection, so as to prepare beforehand for him material for his formation, and to liken his form to an archetypal beauty, and, setting before him a mark for which he is to come into being, to make for him a nature appropriate and allied to the operations, and suitable for the object in hand.⁴¹

It is difficult to imagine an account more emphatically humanistic than this. The grandeur of humanity is such that before creating man and woman, God actually had to *think about it* first. This is humanity before the Fall, before, as Aquinas says, the privation of original justice in human beings; nevertheless, as Aquinas further says, the only thing destroyed by sin in human nature is the original harmony between the soul’s parts—hence the conflict between reason, will, and so on. What remains intact for him is the nature of the soul as soul; i.e., as created. That which, however, is diminished—but not destroyed—is the inclination of the soul to natural virtue. This inclination remains within human beings despite sin, though it tends more toward inferior goods than true ones. This helps to explain why philosophical knowledge is still formally true, though as an historical question the fullness of pre-Christian philosophical truth is for this tradition in a state of potency, waiting to be actuated by Christ. Thus where it concerns humanity Thomas’s principle, *enim gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat*, concerns humanity in its wholeness, not just this or that individual, and not just humanity as a present collectivity, but the whole of humanity, across time.

⁴¹Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series 5) III, 1–2, p. 390.

For the Cappadocians, the Alexandrians, certainly for Augustine and up to Aquinas, salvation is conceived in terms of *theosis* or *deificatio*, the union of the human soul with the triune God. Thomas's famous maxim, that "grace does not destroy but perfects nature," is simply a reiteration of the principle Gregory of Nazianzus articulates to Cledonius. As far as the human person is concerned, *theosis* is also *anthroposis*, *deification* also *hominization*. As Benedict XVI says, "Only Christ can humanize humanity and lead it to its 'divinization.'"⁴²

Therefore, one might even say that what is here in question is not the "re-Hellenization" of Christianity, but, so to speak, the Hellenization of Hellas itself. For the logic of the *spolia* implies that philosophy, for one, becomes more properly itself when transfigured by faith. That is, only in the light of the revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation can philosophy truly become a wisdom. Thus the tradition extending from the Alexandrians and Cappadocians in particular through the twelfth-century Victorines understood Christian doctrine as *philosophia* properly speaking, since it is a habituation into the love and friendship of Christ, the *sophia* of God. Moreover, this shows that it is no mere secular anthropocentrism which animates the celebrated paragraph 22 of *Gaudium et spes*:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.⁴³

⁴²Benedict XVI, Message to the Young People of the World on the Occasion of the 23rd World Youth Day, 2008.

⁴³*Gaudium et spes*, 22. It is in this context that the document cites previous councils, specifically footnote 22: "Second Council of Constantinople, canon 7: 'The divine Word was not changed into a human nature, nor was a human nature absorbed by the Word' (Denzinger 219 [428]); cf. also Third Council of Constantinople: "For just as His most holy and immaculate human nature, though deified, was not destroyed (*theotheisa ouk anerethe*), but rather remained in its proper state and mode of being" (Denzinger 291 [556]); cf. Council of Chalcedon: "to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, change, division, or separation" (Denzinger 148 [302]).

At the close of the council, in its final public session, Paul VI reiterated this theme, insisting that the Church, “more than anyone, professes the cult of man.”⁴⁴ Despite what seemed to some rather vocal and fanatical pamphleteers to be an unacceptable fawning before “modern man,” the extent of Paul’s fidelity to Christian tradition that this comment reflects should by now be clear. It is no

⁴⁴See Paul VI’s speech at the last public session of the Second Vatican Council (7 December 1965): “Yes, the Church of the council has been concerned, not just with herself and with her relationship of union with God, but with man—man as he really is today: living man, man all wrapped up in himself, man who makes himself not only the center of his every interest but dares to claim that he is the principle and explanation of all reality. Every perceptible element in man, every one of the countless guises in which he appears, has, in a sense, been displayed in full view of the council Fathers, who, in their turn, are mere men, and yet all of them are pastors and brothers whose position accordingly fills them with solicitude and love. Among these guises we may cite man as the tragic actor of his own plays; man as the superman of yesterday and today, ever frail, unreal, selfish, and savage; man unhappy with himself as he laughs and cries; man the versatile actor ready to perform any part; man the narrow devotee of nothing but scientific reality; man as he is, a creature who thinks and loves and toils and is always waiting for something, the ‘growing son’ (Gn 49:22); man sacred because of the innocence of his childhood, because of the mystery of his poverty, because of the dedication of his suffering; man as an individual and man in society; man who lives in the glories of the past and dreams of those of the future; man the sinner and man the saint, and so on.

“Secular humanism, revealing itself in its horrible anti-clerical reality has, in a certain sense, defied the council. The religion of the God who became man has met the religion (for such it is) of man who makes himself God. And what happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation? There could have been, but there was none. The old story of the Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the council. A feeling of boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it. The attention of our council has been absorbed by the discovery of human needs (and these needs grow in proportion to the greatness which the son of the earth claims for himself). But we call upon those who term themselves modern humanists, and who have renounced the transcendent value of the highest realities, to give the council credit at least for one quality and to recognize our own new type of humanism: we, too, in fact, we more than any others, honor mankind.”

The official English translation mutes the force of the original Latin: *nam nos etiam, immo nos prae ceteris, hominis sumus cultores*. This occasioned howls of protest from the likes of Abbé Georges de Nantes and Fr. Raymond Leopold Bruckberger, the absurdity of whose interpretations of Paul were exposed by Henri de Lubac. See Appendix D, “The ‘Cult of Man’: In Reparation to Paul VI,” in *Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Br. Richard Armandez, FSC (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 261–90.

more nor less radical than what we have already heard from Gregory of Nyssa. After the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI pressed forward the implications of this in his calls for a full-figured humanism. In his encyclical *Populorum progressio*, he says:

The ultimate goal is a fullbodied humanism. And does this not mean the fulfillment of the whole man and of every man? A narrow humanism, closed in on itself and not open to the values of the spirit and to God who is their source, could achieve apparent success, for man can set about organizing terrestrial realities without God. But “closed off from God, they will end up being directed against man. A humanism closed off from other realities becomes inhuman.”⁴⁵

Paul’s citation of Henri de Lubac’s *Drama of Atheist Humanism* here is significant. It represents a theological trajectory in which Benedict

⁴⁵Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (26 March 1967), 42. The passage continues: “True humanism points the way toward God and acknowledges the task to which we are called, the task which offers us the real meaning of human life. Man is not the ultimate measure of man. Man becomes truly man only by passing beyond himself. In the words of Pascal: ‘Man infinitely surpasses man.’” See also no. 20: “If development calls for an ever-growing number of technical experts, even more necessary still is the deep thought and reflection of wise men in search of a new humanism, one which will enable our contemporaries to enjoy the higher values of love and friendship, of prayer and contemplation, and thus find themselves. This is what will guarantee man’s authentic development—his transition from less than human conditions to truly human ones” (42). Paul VI’s reference is to Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1949), 7. Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the First European Meeting of University Lecturers (23 June 2007): “European culture in recent centuries has been powerfully conditioned by the notion of modernity. The present crisis, however, has less to do with modernity’s insistence on the centrality of man and his concerns, than with the problems raised by a ‘humanism’ that claims to build a *regnum hominis* detached from its necessary ontological foundation. A false dichotomy between theism and authentic humanism, taken to the extreme of positing an irreconcilable conflict between divine law and human freedom, has led to a situation in which humanity, for all its economic and technical advances, feels deeply threatened. As my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, stated, we need to ask ‘whether in the context of all this progress, man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say, more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible and more open to others’ (*Redemptor Hominis*, 15). The anthropocentrism which characterizes modernity can never be detached from an acknowledgment of the full truth about man, which includes his transcendent vocation.”

is situated, and de Lubac's is a theme that Benedict himself has frequently repeated,⁴⁶ not least of all in the planned lecture at La Sapienza in January of 2008, in which he made these significant remarks:

Theology must continue to draw upon a treasury of knowledge that it did not invent, that always surpasses it, the depths of which can never be fully plumbed through reflection, and which for

⁴⁶Cf. for example, *Deus caritas est*, 9 and 30b. He has repeatedly employed the phrase "true," "authentic" or "integral" humanism (a qualified nod to Jacques Maritain). See also his Letter to Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino (10 April 2008): "Joint action is certainly needed at the political, economic and juridical levels, but even before that we need to reflect together on the moral and spiritual level: the promotion of a 'new humanism' seems to be ever more urgently necessary in order to enlighten human beings on the understanding of themselves and the meaning of their journey through history. In this regard the teaching of the Servant of God Pope Paul VI and his proposal of an integral humanism, which aims, in other words, 'to promote the good of every man and of the whole man,' is more timely than ever (*Populorum progressio*, 14). Development cannot be reduced to mere economic growth: it must include the moral and spiritual dimensions. At the same time, an authentic and integral humanism can only consist of solidarity, and solidarity is one of the loftiest expressions of the human spirit; it is one of the natural duties of the human being (cf. Jas 2:15–16), applicable to both individuals and peoples (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 86); the full development of peace depends on the implementation of this duty. Indeed, when man pursues material well-being alone, remaining absorbed in himself, he bars the way to his own total fulfillment and authentic happiness." Cf also the Address to the Participants of the Administrative Board of the Autonomous Pontifical Foundation "Populorum Progressio" for Latin America and the Caribbean Countries (14 June 2007); his address to Participants in the First European Meeting of University Lecturers, on the theme "A New Humanism for Europe. The Role of the Universities" (23 June 2007): "The 'question of man,' which is central to your discussions, is essential for a correct understanding of current cultural processes. It also provides a solid point of departure for the effort of universities to create a new cultural presence and activity in the service of a more united Europe. Promoting a new humanism, in fact, requires a clear understanding of what this "newness" actually embodies. Far from being the fruit of a superficial desire for novelty, the quest for a new humanism must take serious account of the fact that Europe today is experiencing a massive cultural shift, one in which men and women are increasingly conscious of their call to be actively engaged in shaping their own history. Historically, it was in Europe that humanism developed, thanks to the fruitful interplay between the various cultures of her peoples and the Christian faith. Europe today needs to preserve and reappropriate her authentic tradition if she is to remain faithful to her vocation as the cradle of humanism." Also see the message for the World Day of Peace (1 January 2007), among others.

that reason constantly gives rise to new thinking. Balancing “without confusion,” there is always “without separation”: philosophy does not start again from zero with every thinking subject in total isolation, but takes its place within the great dialogue of historical wisdom, which it continually accepts and develops in a manner both critical and docile. It must not exclude what religions, and the Christian faith in particular, have received and have given to humanity as signposts for the journey. Various things said by theologians in the course of history, or even adopted in practice by ecclesiastical authorities, have been shown by history to be false, and today make us feel ashamed. Yet at the same time it has to be acknowledged that the history of the saints, the history of the humanism that has grown out of the Christian faith, demonstrates the truth of this faith in its essential nucleus, thereby giving it a claim upon public reason. Of course, much of the content of theology and faith can only be appropriated within the context of faith, and therefore cannot be demanded of those to whom this faith remains inaccessible. Yet at the same time it is true that the message of the Christian faith is never solely a “comprehensive religious doctrine” in Rawls’ sense, but is a purifying force for reason, helping it to be more fully itself. On the basis of its origin, the Christian message should always be an encouragement towards truth, and thus a force against the pressure exerted by power and interests.

Thus the proper understanding of the relation between faith and reason is analogous to the logic of the hypostatic union: they are united in Christ, without confusion and without separation.

To put this tradition in Thomistic terms, the *matter* of pagan antiquity—as of all human desire and reason—remains yet in a state of potency to its *form*, which is realized in a unitive consummation in Christ. Yet here the hostility between God and the world is shown to be already removed—God, as Gregory of Nyssa says, has no opposite. Thus can Augustine say that “the Church is the world, reconciled.”⁴⁷ Herein lies the full reach of the very name *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*—the wisdom of the obedient Church transcending and completing the (quite differently modulated) obedient wisdom of the Greeks. Athena-Minerva finds her apotheosis in Mary, the handmaid of the Lord; philosophy, in love of Christ the wisdom of God. “Christ reveals man to himself.”

To return to the image of the Egyptian obelisk in the center of St. Peter’s Square: as I have already said, nowhere is there a more

⁴⁷Augustine, Sermon 96.

pointed illustration of the idea of the *spolia Aegyptiorum*. And yet, this sight, which is also the token of the Apostle's martyrdom, is an image of death, and no less of Roman imperial hubris. Now, however, it has been handed over to a different order: it demonstrates, as a sign of a kenotic triumph, that the proper understanding of the spoils of the Egyptians is simply the other side of that other, most characteristic injunction of the New Testament: "love your enemies, and bless those who persecute you . . . for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked."⁴⁸ For that which is not assumed is not healed, and Christian humanism remains a humanism in the hope of the *Apocalypse*: "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."⁴⁹ In the meantime, the very stones cry out.⁵⁰ □

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⁴⁸Lk 6:27, 35; Mt 5:44.

⁴⁹Rev 11:15.

⁵⁰Lk 19:40.