

*NOVUM IN VETERE LATET.  
VETUS IN NOVO PATET:*  
TOWARD A RENEWAL OF  
TYPOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

• Paolo Prosperi •

“That which in the ‘figure’ is a sign of impotence,  
becomes an act of power: eros becomes agape.  
In this transformation, however, the figure is  
not lost. It becomes more resplendent . . . .”



If it is true that “The Christian faith . . . is not based solely on events, but on the conformity of these events to the revelation contained in the Jewish Scriptures,”<sup>1</sup> then it is also true that the relationship between Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel has its place at the *beginning* of theological discourse, not only in a historical-chronological, but also in an ontological sense. In the words of the exegete Paul Beauchamp, “the articulation of the Old and New Testaments is not a preliminary step toward understanding Jesus Christ, but rather lies within this understanding. We are referring here to an understanding of what is essential.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, no. 7.

<sup>2</sup>“Teologia Biblica,” in B. Lauret—F. Refoulé (eds.), *Iniziazione alla pratica della teologia*, vol. 1: *Introduzione* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1986), 197–254; 231.

It is in fact impossible to speak of Jesus of Nazareth without speaking of his relation to the Scriptures of Israel and without thereby proposing a certain—implicit or explicit—*understanding* of this relation. The question regarding the nature of this relation thus is of a piece with the fundamental question of faith: “Who is Jesus of Nazareth?”

The discipline that concerns itself with this question is biblical theology, which Beauchamp defines simply as “that which illustrates the relationship and the rupture between the two Testaments and unearths the principles that govern this relation.” After the radical calling into question of the very possibility of a unitary biblical theology, we are more aware today not only of the necessity of the latter,<sup>3</sup> but also of its reasonable possibility. The “hammer strokes” of the historical-critical method, along with its questionable outcomes, had a salutary effect: they allowed the strength of the framework that binds the biblical texts together to emerge all the more clearly, and allowed us to recognize that this framework is more sophisticated, and composed of jointures more closely interconnected, than appeared to be the case only a few decades ago.

This article takes its place within the contemporary debate regarding the possible paths biblical theology might take, and above all regarding the central question of this debate: how to articulate the relation between the two Testaments. After a brief introduction to the problem, in the light of the debates of the past several decades,<sup>4</sup> we will try to offer some hermeneutical “keys” that indicate a possible and perhaps fruitful way forward: that of a “creative” renewal of the principles underlying the theological method and the

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<sup>3</sup>“That which motivates us to aim at a theology of the two Testaments is a sense that such a theology is necessary. In the face of this, the question whether it is possible becomes secondary” (P. Beauchamp, “È possibile una teologia biblica?” in G. Angelici, *La Rivelazione attestata: La Bibbia fra testo e teologia* [Milan, 1998], 321–22).

<sup>4</sup>The two texts of the Pontifical Biblical Commission are obligatory reference points: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* in 1993 (=PBC 1993) and, above all, with regard to our theme, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* in 2001 (=PBC 2001). An exhaustive survey of the *status quaestionis* of this issue can be found in P. Basta—P. Bovati, *Ermeneutica biblica e metodi esegetici*, especially pp. 86–131 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2009–2010). The most recent study that deals directly with the theme of the relationship between the two Testaments is that of Massimo Grilli: *Quale rapporto tra i due testamenti? Riflessione critica sui modelli ermeneutici classici concernenti l'unità delle Scritture* (Bologna, 2007).

biblical hermeneutics of some of the Fathers of the Church. The value of these principles is often obscured by the more extravagant aspects of patristic exegesis,<sup>5</sup> but it may be that the Fathers still have something to offer us today. The three names that come to mind are, obviously, that of Origen, the master of patristic exegesis;<sup>6</sup> less obviously that of Maximus the Confessor, the great doctor of Chalcedonian Christology; and even less obviously, that of Dionysius the Areopagite,<sup>7</sup> who is usually considered to be the least biblical and the most Platonic figure of the patristic age. We will see that the anagogical and symbolical structure of his speculative synthesis can make a contribution precisely in that sphere which seems the furthest from his own.

### 1. A few premises

1. “The Christian Church . . . has always affirmed that the Old Testament and the New Testament are inseparable.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. I. de la Potterie, “I Padri della Chiesa nello studio attuale della Sacra Scrittura,” in *Lo Studio dei Padri della Chiesa nella ricerca attuale* (Rome, 1991), 486–494; I. Biffi, “Esegesi scientifica ed esegesi allegorica: un divario impertinente,” *Teologia* 17 (1992): 3–15; M. Simonetti and G. M. Vian, “L’esegesi patristica nella ricerca contemporanea,” *Anuario de Istoría de la Iglesia* 6 (1997): 241–67.

<sup>6</sup>As is well-known, the greatest contribution to the re-evaluation of Origen’s exegesis in the twentieth century was made by Henri de Lubac, with *Histoire et Esprit: L’intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène* (Paris, 1950); Eng., *History and Spirit: The Interpretation of the Scriptures according to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007); this work was supported by that of Jean Daniélou, notwithstanding certain differences in perspective (*Origène* [Paris, 1948]). The renewal of interest in Origenian exegesis is a phenomenon so vast as to render a complete bibliography impossible.

<sup>7</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius scholars often fail to recognize that the problem at the center of his reflection, the relation between the One and the many, was not only of interest to neo-Platonist philosophy. The problem was no less central to ancient scriptural exegesis, which moves from the principle, *ex uno verbo omnia*, toward this end: finding the One in the many and in the many a path to the One. At the beginning of *On the Divine Names*, Dionysius himself affirms that the “logoi” that really interest him are those of the “divine oracles” (DN I, 2, 588 C).

<sup>8</sup>This and the following points are taken from PBC 2001, no. 19.

2. “It is in the light of the Old Testament that the New understands the life, death, and glorification of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–4).”

3. “This relationship is also reciprocal: on the one hand, the New Testament demands to be read in the light of the Old, but it also invites a ‘re-reading’ of the Old in the light of Jesus Christ (cf. Lk 24:45).”

4. “How is this ‘re-reading’ to be done? It extends to ‘all the Scriptures’ (Lk 24:27) to ‘everything written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms’ (24:44).”

PBC 2001 affirms four important principles regarding the Church’s understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments: 1. The paschal mystery is the key to understanding the whole of Scripture. 2. This process of understanding is complex: first there is a movement from Christ to the Old Testament, which is indispensable for a full understanding of “what” he is.<sup>9</sup> 3. This is followed by a second return to the Old Testament, which now aims at understanding the Old Testament anew in light of a christological faith. The relation between the Testaments is thus dynamic: it moves from Christ to the Old Testament in order the better to understand Christ, and then turns once again to the Old Testament to understand it in a new manner. We can, then, speak of this dynamic as an *ascending spiral*. 4. This method extends to all the Scriptures because, according to the witness of the apostles, Jesus himself affirmed that all of Scripture is a prophecy of him.<sup>10</sup>

Now, it is obvious that “the New Testament only offers a limited number of examples, not a methodology.”<sup>11</sup> This seems to mean that the re-reading of the Old Testament inaugurated by the authors of the New was understood—in the understanding of the Christian community of the apostolic and sub-apostolic age—to be normative but not exclusive; it offered a paradigm. In the generations that followed, the Church would set out on this path of

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<sup>9</sup>This distinction between “what” (the content of the Old Testament) and “who” (the content of the New Testament) Jesus Christ is, is made by W. Vischer (cited in de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 501); as we will see, this distinction requires some clarifications.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. P. Beauchamp, “Lecture christique de l’Ancien Testament,” *Biblica* 81 (2000): 105–15.

<sup>11</sup>PBC 2001, no. 19.

interpretation so decisively<sup>12</sup> that the fifth-century author Aponius could write that “a teacher who does not transmit the two Testaments in their unity is a murderer of souls.”<sup>13</sup>

As we mentioned, this unitary vision underwent a profound crisis with the advent and rapid expansion of the historical-critical method in Catholic exegesis.<sup>14</sup> In the past few decades, however, we have witnessed a surprising phenomenon: the return, with new and more solid foundations, of that which had seemed irretrievably lost. That which, it was thought, could only be protected from “above” re-emerged precisely “from below,”<sup>15</sup> that is, within the framework of “scientific” reflection.<sup>16</sup> In making the above observation

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<sup>12</sup>The problem of the hermeneutics of the relation between the Old and New Testaments was in fact, and not by chance, at the center of the two most important dogmatic controversies of the Church in the first three centuries: the struggles against Marcion and against the Gnostics. In this regard we would obviously have to add to the four fundamental principles of interpretation listed above, a fifth, the centrality of which we will not further develop here for lack of space: *The Church and, therefore, its Tradition is the hermeneutical locus within which this process of understanding both does and is able to occur.* It follows that when we use the term “paschal mystery,” what we mean by this henceforward is: *according to the understanding that the Church’s authoritative Tradition has of this mystery.* This authoritative understanding constitutes not only a limit; precisely by being such it indicates a direction, and thus is a principle of movement and openness.

<sup>13</sup>*In Cant.* Book VI, 114–15.

<sup>14</sup>I. de la Potterie’s critical analysis of this issue remains valid: *L’esegesi cristiana oggi* (Casale Monferrato, 1991). Cf. in this volume especially J. Ratzinger, “L’interpretazione biblica in conflitto. Problemi del fondamento ed orientamento dell’esegesi contemporanea,” 93–125; Eng., “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Biblical Exegesis Today,” in R. J. Neuhaus (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). Among the commentaries on PBC 1993, we refer the reader to P. S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture*; G. Ghiberti and F. Masetto (eds.), *L’interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa* (Turin, 1998); M. Girard, “Il Documento della Pontificia Commissione Biblica, ‘L’interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa’: bilancio e prospettive,” in *Atti della Giornata Celebrativa per il 100 Anniversario di Fondazione della Pontificia Commissione Biblica* (Vatican City, 2003), important for the new perspectives it opens; and for an excellent “historical” reconstruction of the question, W. Yarchin, *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader* (Peabody, Mass., 2004).

<sup>15</sup>Cf. E. Bianchi, “La lettura spirituale della Scrittura oggi,” in *L’esegesi cristiana*, 223.

<sup>16</sup>We refer at least to 1) the third phase (*Redaktion-Geschichte*) of the evolution of

regarding the return of this unitary vision of the Scriptures, we are obviously not affirming that one ought to or can pass over superficially the equally obvious fact that, at least to the critical eye of the contemporary reader, there is a real and often radical divergence between the biblical texts.<sup>17</sup> Rather, we are making the claim that it is once again possible to see the phenomenon of simultaneous continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments as the locus of biblical theology.

*2. Between continuity and discontinuity:  
the difficult "place" of biblical theology*

We find ourselves, then, once again facing the perennial question: how do we understand the complex interplay of continuity and discontinuity between the Old and the New Testaments? Moreover, how do we understand this interplay as a phenomenon

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the historical-critical method. The realization that the "original text" remains inaccessible led to a crisis of *Literarkritik* and to an acknowledgment of the importance of the final redactor. 2) The rediscovery of the phenomenon of "re-reading" as a key to understanding the genesis of biblical texts: the Bible consists of writings that are based on what preceded them. Cf. N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1982); P. Beauchamp, *L'Un et L'Autre Testament* (2 vols.) (Paris, 1977–1990); "Théologie biblique," in B. Lauret and F. Refoulé (eds.), *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1982), 185–232; "Accomplir les Écritures. Un chemin de théologie biblique," in *RB* 99 (1992). 3) The recognition of intertextuality as a fundamental category for understanding the *intentio auctoris* of the New Testament writers, who themselves think on the basis of the Scriptures of Israel. 4) Reflection on the concept of canon as both fluid and defined. This led to a better understanding of the community that "reads" as not only receptive but also constitutive of the texts themselves. Hence the birth of canonical criticism (B. S. Childs, J. A. Sanders, etc.). 5) Increasing awareness of the importance of symbolical language in the Bible, and of the symbol as that which unifies differences or synthesizes (M. Girard, *Les Symboles dans la Bible: Essai de théologie biblique enracinée dans l'expérience humaine universelle* [Montreal-Paris, 1991]). 6) Growing interest on the part of the contemporary philosophy of language in the phenomenon of "reading," for example, in hermeneutics (cf. the work of Paul Ricoeur), structuralism, and grammatology (Derrida). All this contributed to the turn from the "archeological" to the "teleological" (Beauchamp) that characterizes the most innovative currents of contemporary exegesis.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Beauchamp's authoritative treatment of this issue in P. Beauchamp, *Leggere la Scrittura oggi: Con quale spirito accostarsi alla Bibbia* (Milan, 1990), 41–61.

that is proper to biblical discourse as such? In other words, what does it mean that Christ “fulfills *all* the Scriptures”?<sup>18</sup> Clearly, a real answer to this question can only emerge through the concrete activity of exegesis.<sup>19</sup> We must nonetheless pose the question of the laws that govern this relation. In taking up this theme, PBC 2001 identifies a third principle that functions as a bridge between continuity and discontinuity, that is, *progression*: “discontinuity on certain points is only the negative side of what is positively called progression. The New Testament attests that Jesus, far from being in opposition to the Israelite Scriptures, revoking them as provisional, brings them instead to fulfillment in his person, in his mission, and especially in his paschal mystery.”<sup>20</sup> This explanation does not answer the question, but it does make it more precise: how is this progression to be understood? Better, what does “bringing to fulfillment” mean?

The same document states that “the notion of fulfillment is . . . extremely complex,”<sup>21</sup> since it cannot be limited to the idea of correspondence to an expectation (continuity), but must be able to include the dimension of the unexpected (rupture/transcendence):<sup>22</sup> “In reality, in the mystery of Christ crucified and risen, fulfillment is brought about in a manner unforeseen. It includes transcendence. Jesus is not confined to playing an already fixed role—that of Messiah—but he confers, on the notions of Messiah and salvation, a fullness which could not have been imagined in advance; he fills

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<sup>18</sup>Beyond the now classic studies (D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: A Study of the Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testament* [London, 1991]; B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* [London, 1992]), we refer the reader to the more recent work of Massimo Grilli cited above (*Quale rapporto*), which has the merit of integrating a serious re-examination of some classical biblical *loci* of this theme with a study of the patristic and ecclesial tradition.

<sup>19</sup>We see this in the very structure of PBC 2001, the bulk of which (nos. 19–65) is dedicated to an examination of the fundamental themes that bind together the Old and New Testaments.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 64.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 21.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, no. 64.

them with a new reality; one can even speak in this connection of a ‘new creation.’”<sup>23</sup>

The biblical idea of fulfillment thus implies an interplay between continuity and rupture, such that the words we use to refer to the Old Testament figures and to the mystery of Christ who fulfills them can be the *same*, while at the same time their meaning is *transformed*. Perhaps the least inappropriate theological term we can use to indicate this complex phenomenon of transsignification is *transfiguration*, if by this we mean a change of aspect that does not damage the exterior form of the reality illuminated, but rather exalts it, conferring on it a splendor that radiates from within and that had remained hidden within its depths before rising to the surface. The term thus highlights the fundamental methodological criterion to which any legitimate “figural” exegesis must adhere: respect for and preservation of the “letter” of the text. As Balthasar expressed it, “The spiritual sense is never to be sought behind the literal but always within it, just as the Father is found, not behind the Son, but in him and through him.”<sup>24</sup>

The term “transfiguration” recommends itself all the more because of its aesthetic connotation: it does not refer merely to a change in aspect. Rather, it points to the reception of splendor, beauty, glory, inebriation of the heart in the one who perceives: “It is good for us to be here!” “Did not our hearts burn within us . . . ?” (Mk 9:5; Lk 24:32). Now that we have set forth these premises, we can turn to the substance of our argument.

### *3. In search of guiding principles*

#### *3.1 The paschal mystery as the key that opens the Scriptures*

The New Testament unanimously affirms that the various strands of the Scriptures converge on a central point, the mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection. We can make two observations in this regard.

1. Jesus himself is at the origin of this conviction, which is shared by all the New Testament authors. We are not, then, simply

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 439.

dealing here with a post-Easter re-reading. To the contrary, it is likely that, precisely by meditating on the Scriptures, Jesus understood, by virtue of the infallible “hermeneutical” action of the Spirit, the meaning of his imminent death.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, he embraced it freely, thereby transforming it into a sacrificial act. There is thus no need to postulate an immediate foreknowledge on the part of Jesus to explain what he says about his own death,<sup>26</sup> or his awareness of its significance (cf. Jn 13:1, 19:28). While the details may be debatable (e.g., What exactly was Jesus’ pre-Easter understanding of the Scriptures? Did he really understand his death in the light of the figure of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah?), the fundamental affirmation remains: the relation between Jesus and the “fulfillment of the Scriptures” is not extrinsic to the historical figure of Jesus, because this relation lies at the root of the most important decision of his earthly life and provides the form of his historical obedience to the Father. Jesus obeys the Father by obeying the Scriptures (Mt 26:54; Lk 22:37 and 24:44).

2. After his Pasch, Jesus himself began the process of re-reading the Scriptures (Lk 24:27), leaving to the apostles the task of continuing this re-reading in the light of the Spirit (Jn 16:12–15). The fundamental reference point for this re-reading could not but be the foundational event of Israel, i.e., the “Passover” that celebrates the liberation of the chosen people from slavery and their exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. The Passover is this point of reference not only because of the importance traditionally attributed to this “figure,” but because, very simply, *Jesus died and rose during the Passover feast*. The fact precedes interpretation, even if interpretation, which takes place through the reciprocal comparison of figure with fulfillment, leads us to perceive in and draw from the fact meanings that do not appear in the “bare facts,” but that emerge precisely through the return to the figure.<sup>27</sup> The narration of Jesus’

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Beauchamp, *Lecture christique*, 118ff.

<sup>26</sup>Mt 16:21–23, 21:33–43, 20:17–19; Mk 8:31–33, 9:9–10 and 31–32, 10:32–34; Lk 9:22 and 9:43–45, 18:31–33; Jn 12:20–36, etc.

<sup>27</sup>The early Church very quickly developed a notion that could hold together both aspects proper to the idea of fulfillment: that which the majority of modern scholars call *typology* or *figure* (cf. Auerbach, Beauchamp). While much has been written on this contested topic, we recall here three indisputable facts: 1) Typology is a phenomenon *of* (that is, to be found *within*) the Scriptures, and occupies a

death in Jn 19:28–37 represents the most advanced phase of this process. In it, this death is contemplated through the prism of densely interwoven allusions to the Scriptures that allow it to be seen as a fulfillment<sup>28</sup> and as containing an inexhaustible richness of meaning.

### 3.2 *The christological analogy*

#### a. *A unity that is dialogical and dynamic*

As we have already mentioned, this reciprocal comparison must first of all be a “dialogue” (Grilli) that takes place in full respect for the “letter” of the figure and for that which distinguishes it from its fulfillment: Jesus is not a lamb. Every association by way of likeness (spotlessness, silent abandon, sacrifice) is fruitful only by interacting with this starting point. In other words, only a dynamic dialogue that acknowledges the “distance” allows for a renewed understanding of the figure (Jesus is the true lamb without blemish [1 Pt 1:19]) through its fulfillment, and at the same time broadens my understanding of the fulfillment itself (the “blemishes” acquire a different meaning than they had in the figure). There is a twofold movement: “from the past to the present, in the sense that the Old

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central place in them. Both the Old and New Testaments find in it the key to a unitary and dynamic theology of history, oriented teleologically toward the fulfillment of that which had been present in the form of promise or “figure.” 2) The characteristic of New Testament typology is that this “fulfillment” is understood to be realized through Jesus’ Pasch. 3) Typology does not at all imply a negation of the value of the event or figure that is thus “typologized.” It simply affirms that this event or figure, while remaining itself, is also the prefiguration of a future event, simultaneously like and unlike the former. The autonomy of the Old Testament “letter” is thus safeguarded. Cf. L. Goppelt, *Typos. Die Typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments im Neuen* (Ann Arbor, 1982); J. Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri, études sur les origines de la typologie biblique* (Paris, 1950); H. de Lubac, *Histoire et Esprit; Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l’Écriture* (Paris, 1959–1964); *L’Écriture dans la tradition* (Paris, 1966); B. S. Childs, *Biblical theology*, 27ff.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. R. Vignolo, “La morte di Gesù nel quarto vangelo come compimento (Gv 19, 28–30),” in G. Ghiberti, et al. (eds.), *Opera giovannea* (2003), 273–91. The gospel of John frames the entire account of the Passion with the terms *telos* (Jn 13:1) and *tetelestai* (Jn 19:28–30). Numerous exegetes understand the *eis to telos* of Jn 13:1 (“having loved his own in the world, he loved them *to the end*”) to mean, “to the fulfillment of that which was written.”

Testament is the firm foundation on which the New stands; and from the present to the past, in the sense that the event of Jesus sheds a new light on the hope of Israel.”<sup>29</sup>

On the one hand, then, the sponge soaked with vinegar offered to Jesus thirsting on the cross reveals that he is the just man of Psalm 69, who suffers because of his zeal for the house of the Lord. On the other hand, no sooner is the figure “superimposed” over the fulfillment than it is transfigured, revealing unsuspected depths, because he who tastes the vinegar of ingratitude and hatred (this is the symbolic meaning of the vinegar in the “letter” of the Psalm) is no longer a passive victim. He tastes the full bitterness of hatred because he *wants* to, a fact that John expresses by affirming that Jesus utters the mysterious words, “I thirst,” *in order to* “fulfill the Scriptures” (Jn 19:28). The literal sense of the prophecy is simultaneously preserved and transformed: this vinegar that Jesus tastes freely becomes at the same time the sign of the burning love of God, who not only drinks the vinegar of ingratitude and hatred in order to cast out evil from the human heart, but *desires* to do this! We would never have seen this without confronting the fulfillment with the “figure” of the Psalm.

The above example is a good expression of the “transformative” aspect that this dialogue between “figure” and “Mystery” can and must have. It is not enough to *juxtapose* unity and difference. We must take a step further, daring to let our gaze fall on the surprising semantic transformations that happen to the “figure” when it is *superimposed* on the fulfillment. Something thus happens to us that is similar to how John describes the body of the Risen One, whom he sees in a vision at the beginning of the book of Revelation: “his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force” (Rev 1:14–16). When they are read in the light of the mystery of Christ, the ancient Scriptures glow red-hot, radiating a heat that makes our hearts “burn” within us (Lk 24:32).

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<sup>29</sup>Grilli, *Quale rapporto*, 194.

*b. Transfiguration*

This brings us back to our key concept, transfiguration, which has a long history in exegesis. As we noted above, Origen was the author who employed this term first and most extensively to describe the transsignification that happens to the Old Testament in the light of the mystery of Christ.<sup>30</sup> On Mount Tabor, it is not only Moses who glorifies Christ, for when Moses and Elijah come into contact with Jesus, their garments become incandescent.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, when Joshua is recognized as a figure of Christ, he is not “disparaged.” To the contrary, the Old Testament figure receives a glory more permanent and more universal than he had before, because he reveals something of the mystery of Christ that he, *through the traits that belong to him alone*, can make manifest. Of course we can smile at Origen’s oftentimes overly allegorical and minutely detailed associations and conclude that they belong to a long-dead past. To a large extent this is true. But in doing so we lose sight of a vision of the whole, and of the fact that the typological foundation upon which Origen paints his grand frescos is not at all an arbitrary invention. Almost always he deals with typologies already explicitly or implicitly present in the New Testament. Origen’s homilies on the book of Joshua do not contain only the minute allegorization of the particulars of the siege of Jericho; they also contain an intuition of something that, precisely because it belongs properly to Joshua, tells me something priceless about the mystery of Christ, once the latter has cast his light over the former. Thus the religious fury of the “holy exterminations” that God demands of Israel must be received in its shocking literality, in order that, once it has been transposed

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<sup>30</sup>Cf. Origen, *Comm. Mt.* XII, 29ff.; *Hom. Ex.* XII, 1ff. On the meaning of the mystery of the Transfiguration in Origen, see M. Eichinger, *Die Verklärung Christi bei Origenes. Die Bedeutung des Menschen Jesus in seiner Christologie* (Vienna, 1969); H. J. Sieben, *Transfiguration*, in DS XV 1151–1160; de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, 315–16; H. Crouzel, *Origène* (Paris, 1985), 184–88; J. R. Menard, “Transfiguration et polymorphie chez Origène,” in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris, 1972).

<sup>31</sup>Cf. *CIOI*, 33; *De princ.* IV, 1, 6. It is important that when Origen discusses the apparition of Moses and Elijah to Jesus in *Comm. Mt.* XII, 38, he does not refer to the text of Matthew’s gospel, but rather to Luke 9:31, the only text in the gospels that says that the two prophets “appeared in glory” while they spoke with Jesus.

onto the spiritual and christic plane,<sup>32</sup> it can help us to see a dimension of the paschal mystery that really exists, but that is barely mentioned in the New Testament: the epic, warlike dimension of Christ's sacrifice, which the Fathers contemplated and the liturgy preserves. Joshua shows us that there is an implacable fury hidden in the Cross. Of course, there is a different land to be conquered; the weapons of Christ are obedience and meekness, and the enemies are not of "flesh and blood" (Eph 6:12). Learning to love nonetheless means allowing the Spirit pitilessly to exterminate every lie in us that is opposed to love. Jesus' zeal (Jn 2:17) contains no less "fury" than Joshua's, and returning to the figure of Joshua keeps us from blunting its force. It helps us to enter into the profound "logic" of the war of the Spirit, in which maximum determination goes hand in hand with maximum humility, because the exclusive reason behind the victory of the chosen people is the power of God.

If we turn to the typological relation Adam-Christ/Eve-Church that appears clearly in the gospel of John (Jn 2:4, 19:26–27 and 34), we see, within an abiding respect for the difference between letter and fulfillment, that this relation, too, acquires immeasurable semantic power once the various aspects of the relation of "dissimilar likeness," between figure and fulfillment have been allowed to "work." Thus, for example, the sleep of Adam and the death of Jesus at first seem to have little in common. Once I discover that the figure is a figure, however, the "deep sleep" cast upon Adam allows me to perceive in Jesus' death something that *cannot be perceived in any other way*. According to the most reliable interpretations,<sup>33</sup> the profound torpor that God casts upon Adam is connected in the text of Gn 2:21 with Adam's solitude (Gn 2:20), his need and desire for

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<sup>32</sup>Here as always, we must not insist too exclusively on the aspect of discontinuity. As contemporary exegesis teaches us, the "letter" of the text already contains a much more spiritual meaning than what seems to be the case for a superficial reading. The vow to exterminate the inhabitants of Jericho, for example, is already clearly re-read by the deuteronomist redactor in a religious light, i.e., the struggle against the spread of the worship of Canaanite idols; the narrative is ordered to this end. Cf. T. Römer, *Dal Deuteronomio ai libri dei Re* (2007); F. Ronchi and H. W. Hertzberg, *Giosuè-Giudici-Ruth* (Brescia, 2001).

<sup>33</sup>The exact meaning of this objectively obscure text remains contested. A good summary of the various interpretations of Adam's sleep can be found in John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, trans. M. Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006), no. 8, pp. 156–61.

a companion to whom he cannot give form or flesh.<sup>34</sup> This need returns him to a kind of primordial emptiness, a trance (*tardemah*) or impotent expectation that God alone can satisfy by re-forming him into one in two: we see an allusion to this in the “wound” in his side. All of this opens an otherwise inaccessible horizon of understanding regarding Jesus’ death. Superimposing the images over one another, we discover that in the latter, too, there is a mystery of solitude, a profound desire that leads to an emptying of the self (Phil 2:7). But this *exstasis* (Gn 2:21, Septuagint version) is no longer involuntary (Phil 2:7: “he emptied *himself*”). To the contrary, it is an active sleep, a voluntary self-emptying for the sake of generating his Bride (Eph 5:25–32). That which in the “figure” is a sign of impotence, becomes an act of power: eros becomes agape. In this transformation, however, the figure is not lost. It becomes more resplendent, for the sovereignly active gratuity of the divine Agape allows us to glimpse within it something approaching a real “solitude,” a profound eros that moves God to come out of himself<sup>35</sup> in the *exstasis* of death. Of course, the wound that the Father permits in his Son’s side, which gives rise to the Bride, expresses not poverty but superabundance: the superabundance of the divine Agape that can inundate the world through the opening in Christ’s side. John communicates this with his description of the blood and water that poured forth from the side of Christ “immediately” (*euthus!* Jn 19:34) as if to suggest the Spirit’s impatience to come forth from him and to fill the whole world. What is more, that such a pouring forth of the Spirit takes place through a wound identical to the wound in Adam’s side also suggests that within this superabundance there is a real poverty. Within the divine impassibility there is a real suffering over the human race that has distanced itself from the divine life, and a real desire that humanity return to God. The Fathers as well as the great medieval authors and mystics of all times speak of something like a divine eros by commenting on a book of the Old Testament:

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<sup>34</sup>In our opinion, it is possible to see in the torpor cast upon Adam a figure of desire (eros), that is, of a need emerging from his depths, as the Greek Septuagint translation suggests with the term *exstasis*, provided that it is purified of every reductive Freudian or sexual connotation. In the thought of the biblical author, Adam’s need for the woman is understood as something much more profound and original. Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, esp. 159–60.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *DV* IV, 13 (PG 3, 712); N. Cabasilas, *Vita in Christo*, 644d–645.

the Song of Songs. Are they really that distant from the “truth” of the biblical *logos*? Or is it not rather the case that the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord is filled with more or less veiled references to the symbols of spousal love? And is it also not rather the case that only the typological reference to the Song and to other related Old Testament texts—an exegesis that dares to go a little further than what can be incontrovertibly proven—allows us to perceive these references?

Of course, this is a risky undertaking. The alternative, however, is riskier still: if we deny on principle the value of spiritual interpretation, we must resign ourselves to admitting that the canon contains texts that no longer contain any meaning for us. And we must then ask, why should we retain a text in the canon if it is imperfect or even mistaken? The ancient response to this question remains the most natural: the literal sense of certain texts is ephemeral (e.g., the curses contained in the Psalms), but their spiritual interpretation is not. Typological interpretation is in fact demanded by the affirmation that the Scriptures are *inspired* and therefore contain a permanent value. Alongside a historical reading (and never without it), we must be able to find space for a reading of the texts *sub specie Christi*—a reading which is simply the consequence of the assumption of the Old Testament into the permanent glory of the New.

### c. Perichoresis

Another theological reality can provide a basis for this idea of a dynamic and “transfiguring” unity that preserves distinction: the unity in distinction of the two natures in the person of Christ. Maximus the Confessor speaks in this regard of *perichoresis*,<sup>36</sup> or a dynamic indwelling between the natures such that a reciprocal “communication of properties”<sup>37</sup> takes place: the hypostatic union

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<sup>36</sup>On the importance of this concept for contemporary theology, cf. L. C. Rossetti, “La perichoresi: una chiave della teologia cattolica. A proposito della recente riflessione trinitaria,” *Lateranum* 3 (2006): 553–75.

<sup>37</sup>*Amb. Th.* 5, PG 91, 1057 D–1060 B. Cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie* (Einsiedeln, 1961), 255; Eng., *Cosmic Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003). Cf. also P. Sherwood, *Saint Maximus the Confessor* (London, 1955), 57–58.

enables the *logos*<sup>38</sup> of each of the two natures to remain intact and at the same time transforms their modality (*tropos*) of being and acting. Jesus is “divinely” human and “humanly” divine.<sup>39</sup> The linguistic consequence of this doctrine is well-known: I can truly say that God “wept,” even though it remains true that he did not weep as God but as man. Someone might raise the objection that this is simply a useless word game. But for the contemplative eyes of faith, this consequence reveals something essential: Jesus’ tears at Bethany (Jn 11:35) are human tears, the same as all other human tears. But because this man is God, these tears possess, hidden within the “letter,” a sense that elevates them infinitely above—and in part opposes them to<sup>40</sup>—any other human tears. They no longer express mere human compassion (“See how he loved him!”), but divine compassion (elevation). They do not express an impotent despair (Jn 11:33), but the power of divine Love, which precisely by making the prison of human suffering and darkness his own, bursts it open from within (Jn 11:43–44). Everything is the same. And everything is Other than it was. It is not by chance that the shortest verse in the New Testament consists of only two words: *Edakrusen o Jesus*, “Jesus wept.”

Just as in the case of the flesh of Christ, we do not need to negate the historical-literal sense of the “figures” of the Old Testament, which in its own spatial-temporal context may well have contained very little orientation to the future. Nevertheless, once these figures have been taken up into the light of the paschal mystery, the “flesh” of the text, while remaining itself, must be able to radiate a different light. It must be able to receive a new modality (*tropos*) of “being” and “acting,” in such a way that this new modality involves no change in the word (*logos*).

If what we have said thus far is correct, we can make three related affirmations. In order to express something Other than itself while remaining itself, the figure must have both 1) a certain likeness to and 2) a certain difference from this “Other.” These two aspects are not mutually exclusive, but rather reinforce one another, because the figure expresses the “Other” not only through likeness, but also

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<sup>38</sup>*Amb. Th.* 5, PG 91, 1057 D–1060 B; cf. also *Th. Pol.*, 7, PG 91, 84 D–88 B.

<sup>39</sup>See *Amb. Th.* 5, PG 91, 1056 A.

<sup>40</sup>See *Amb. Th.* 5, PG 91, 1053 B–C.

by way of contrast with it.<sup>41</sup> 3) There is, however, a third moment, in which precisely that which is “cast aside” in the figure is taken up into its fulfillment. This process, which we have called “transfiguration,” sheds a new light on the mystery of fulfillment itself.

d. Omnia loquuntur unum ineffabile

The third thesis, that the Old Testament not only sheds light on the New but, once it is read in the Spirit through the New, integrates the latter, is doubtless the most controversial. This strange affirmation has two arguments in its favor. 1) The Church affirms that Scripture in its totality really speaks of Christ, or in other words, that it is *really* inspired by a single Spirit. 2) No one (least of all a historian) can deny that Jesus Christ transcends that which the New Testament tells me about him.<sup>42</sup>

Both statements together allow me to conclude that precisely because no name, title, or function exhausts who he is, Jesus Christ can be the point of convergence not only of the various titles he receives in the New Testament, but also of those that, while not found in the New, are hidden in the Old Testament. The affirmation of *Dei Verbum*, while true, is easily misunderstood: “among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence” (*DV*, 18). This is true in a pedagogical and, we might say, in an epistemological sense: the New Testament provides me with the concrete figure of Christ as the obligatory reference point for understanding the Old Testament figures. It is face to face with the New that the Old becomes resplendent.

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<sup>41</sup>The Adam-Christ typology St. Paul highlights is the most obvious example of this principle.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Jn 21:25. “The four gospels are not the simple sum of the four books; the latter invite us to look for a point from which we can understand all four, which is quite different. The four gospels are to be received as an invitation to move toward that Jesus Christ who keeps silent among the books” (P. Beauchamp, *Leggere la Sacra Scrittura*, 45). On the “ungraspability” of the figure of Christ by means of exegetical research alone, cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *Gesù ci conosce, noi conosciamo Gesù?* (Brescia, 1982), 77–84. Eng., *Does Jesus Know Us? Do We Know Him?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983). On Jesus Christ as the key to the unity of the New Testament, cf. J. Aletti, *Gesù Cristo: l'unità del Nuovo Testamento? Saggi di lettura* (Rome, 1995).

Conversely, however, the repertory of Old Testament figures that are fulfilled in Christ is much more vast than those figures explicitly mentioned in the New. On this point, the patristic tradition remains “ahead” of much of contemporary exegesis. Thus, for example, this christological “key” allowed generations of believers to draw near to the divine-human heart of Jesus through Psalm 21 or 69 with a profundity and an “objectivity” to which the New Testament alone does not provide access.

### 3.3 “Anagogical” logic in the light of the paschal mystery: *re-reading Dionysius*

#### a. Telos: regarding the notion of fulfillment

At this point, we can return to our central question: what is the exact definition of “fulfillment,” the concept that determines the difficult relation of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments? If what we have said thus far is correct, then the question Conzelmann once posed, “How is it possible to safeguard both the continuity and the radical novelty of the Christ-event?” has a very simple and traditional answer: this is precisely the task of the spiritual sense. There is no full continuity between the Testaments *before* “spiritual” interpretation. The New Testament has undeniably gone beyond the Old. And yet that continuity *really exists*, and appears to the gaze of one who reads the Old Testament with the eyes of the Spirit. In other words, it is perfectly possible to affirm continuity and discontinuity without fixing precise limits, because both are true *to the maximum extent*. There is full continuity. But at the same time there is just as radical a discontinuity, because the interpretation that Jesus gives of the Law through his words, his actions, and above all through his death and resurrection, profoundly transforms the understanding of the words, figures, and archetypes of the Law and the prophets that existed prior to him.<sup>43</sup> We see this definitively in the extreme case, or the most “scandalous” affirmation of the gospels: Jesus’ divine identity. How can Jesus’ claim coexist with traditional monotheism? And yet Jesus bases his argument for

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. Grilli’s important observations regarding Jesus in the gospel of Matthew as *original interpreter* of the Law, in *Quale rapporto*, 131–48.

this unheard-of claim precisely on the long-heard ancient words of the Scriptures: “The Lord said to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand’ . . . If then David called him Lord, how can he be his son?” (Mt 22:44–45; cf. Jn 10:34). Thus John in his prologue will not present the divinity of the Logos (Jn 1:2) as a contradiction of the “one and only” God of Moses (Dt 6:4), but as the *aletheia* (Jn 1:17b), the unveiling of the depths hidden within the words of Moses. This implies deepening our understanding of what “one” means, a reflection which could take place only with difficulty and over the course of centuries.

Is this response to the question posed above still valid? We think it is, and we believe that it is precisely the concept of “fulfillment” as this emerges in the New Testament that permits us to make this affirmation.

We owe to N. Lohfink<sup>44</sup> a fully convincing reinterpretation<sup>45</sup> of the meaning of the term *telos* in a passage of capital importance for our theme: 2 Cor 3:13–14. According to Lohfink, that which the veil over Moses’ face kept the Israelites from beholding is not the *end* of something that was only ephemeral, but rather its *fulfillment*. Such an interpretation profoundly transforms the global meaning of Paul’s thought: “If we mean [with the term, *telos*] ‘the goal’ of the Torah (and not ‘the conclusion’), then Paul would be saying that the veil keeps the Israelites from seeing the profound meaning of that glory that was on the face of Moses. That is, it keeps them from seeing the

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<sup>44</sup>N. Lohfink, *Der niemals gekündigte Bund. Exegetische Gedanken zum christlich-jüdischen Dialog* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1989). Cf. Grilli, *Quale rapporto*, 91–101.

<sup>45</sup>Lohfink’s reading recommends itself in light of one of the fundamental characteristics of the *mens* of the biblical authors, Paul not excepted: the so-called “law of antiquity” or precedence. For a man of antiquity in general and for the Israelite in particular, that which is older has the greater value. Hence Paul argues for justification by faith on the basis of the greater antiquity of Abraham with respect to Moses (Gal 3:17–19; Rom 4; cf. J. L. Ska, *Introduzione alla lettura del Pentateuco* [Bologna, 2000], 187–93). In the same way, it makes more sense in our context to see in Paul’s reference to the glory hidden under the veil of Moses a *confirmation* of the greater glory of the New Covenant, rather than a polemic. The New Covenant has the right to claim to be ultimate or definitive because it is first and older. Thus the expression “*palaia diatheke*” cannot have the negative sense found in Rom 7:6; here it indicates normative authority. The blindness of the sons of Israel does not consist in the fact that they continue to read the Law—to attribute any such claim to Paul would be absurd—but rather in failing to see the glory hidden under the veil of the letter.

fulfillment of the Law, the fullness realized in Jesus Christ, because it is only in Christ that the veil is removed.”<sup>46</sup> There is, then, no opposition between Christ and Moses. Rather, faith in Christ allows us to see “unveiled” all the glory of the Law, a glory that without him would remain “veiled” because it lacks the transforming power it receives from the Spirit of Christ (2 Cor 3:18).

If Lohfink is right, this means that the notion of “fulfillment” to which Paul is pointing us has its key precisely in the rereading or re-understanding of the Law in the freedom of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17). Again, the promise or figure which is brought to “fulfillment” must accept the transformation of meaning effected by him who fulfills, in order to be glorified by him. This inevitably passes through a moment of negation or “discontinuity” that is more or less radical according to the concrete instance.

*b. Negation not according to privation  
but according to eminence<sup>47</sup>*

How are we to understand a negation that, once it is taken up into the heart of an affirmation, has the paradoxical effect of exalting that which is negated? Are we dealing here with a phenomenon without analogy?

We find in fact something very similar within the framework of the debate in late antiquity between the Church and Neo-Platonism: the problem of the tension between affirmation and negation—related to the dialectic between the one and the many—that took on radical form in the question of the “divine

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<sup>46</sup>In fact this reading can already be found in Origen: “Moses seems to me to rejoice also for this reason: he himself also now, in a sense, puts aside ‘the veil having turned to the Lord,’ when those things which he predicted are clearly fulfilled or when the time arrived that those things which he had concealed might be revealed by the Spirit” (*Hom. in Ex.* XII, 3; translation from Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982]).

<sup>47</sup>The expression belongs to Pseudo-Dionysius and is of critical importance for understanding his negative theology. Cf. R. Roques, “Contemplation, Extase et Ténèbre selon le Pseudo-Denys,” *DSp* 2, 2 (Paris, 1953), 1885–911, cf. col. 1892–893; “De l’implication des méthodes théologiques chez le Pseudo-Denys,” *RAM* (30) 1954, 268–74. More recently, Y. de Andia, *Henosis: L’Union à Dieu chez Denys L’Aréopagite* (Philosophia Antiqua) (Brill, 1996), 376–98.

names.” The negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, which provided a way to address this problem, proved to be of great importance for all subsequent Christian theology.<sup>48</sup> When we speak of God, says Dionysius, the negation is to be carried out in all of its radicality. No name for him is adequate. But this is a negation “according to supereminence, not according to privation” (MT I, 2, 1000B). All these names can indeed be given to God, but they must pass through the “cross” of a real negation, so that they can reveal their own interior *dynamis*: they do not arrest the intellect, but help it to ascend. Something analogous can be said, according to Dionysius, of the images and symbols with which Scripture speaks to us of the mystery of God.<sup>49</sup> Only by passing through the purification of negation does the symbol become truly luminous; through it shines forth, “beyond the intelligible sense, the reality of the mystery that is symbolized.”<sup>50</sup>

Can we say that the same thing happens in the admittedly more complex dynamism of typology, understood in its full breadth? We think so. Just as Dionysius’ *aphairesis* does not lead to agnosticism or to iconoclasm, because the names and symbols used for God are understood according to super-eminence, the many figures of the Old Testament, once “negated” through the Cross, rise up sublimated in the super-eminence of the mystery of Christ, the God-man who died for us according to the Scriptures and who sits at the Father’s right hand: they become icons through which we glimpse the unique Mystery.

Jesus did not come as the messianic warrior and liberator that Israel, to a great extent, was expecting (cf. Gn 49:10–11; Ps 2:11, etc.), and yet those who received him realized that he is truly the king they were waiting for. Of course, he is this in a sense so “sublime” that at first glance he seems to disappoint them, but this

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<sup>48</sup>Cf. Y. de Andia, *Denys l’Aréopagite: Tradition et métamorphoses* (Paris, 2006).

<sup>49</sup>On the interconnection between symbolic theology and negative theology in Dionysius, cf. R. Roques, “Symbolisme et théologie négative,” *Structures théologiques. De la Gnose à Richard de Saint-Victor* (Paris, 1962).

<sup>50</sup>Y. de Andia, “Symbole et Mystère,” in *Denys*, 93: “The symbol is . . . inseparable from the purifying negation that allows the appearance, beyond the intelligible sense, of the reality of the mystery that is symbolized. The symbol cannot be read at the level of the symbol. Only the spirit (*nous*) can explain the symbol by elevating it toward its Cause and returning it to the One.”

disappointment has to do with the common image and idea of a warrior; it is not a negation of the *res* as such. The name and the image are truly valid. While they lose their sinister, dark character, their content is intensified to the extreme: the book of Revelation not only shows us Christ as the terrible victor (Rev 19:11–16), but even alludes to the “unbridled inebriation” of the one who treads the “wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” (Rev 19:15). He is inebriated, however, not from shedding the blood of others, but by the fruit of his own sacrifice: our salvation.

Again, we witness this dynamic at work in the Pauline antithesis *par excellence*, between the law and grace. On the one hand, Paul affirms clearly that the law does not justify and that justification comes from faith “apart from the law”; and yet he adds, “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we confirm the law” (Rom 3:21). As long as the two statements are considered on the same plane, there is no solution to the apparent contradiction. But if we follow the logic we have traced out above, we see that the law must allow itself to be “reread” in the light of the Gospel in order to be confirmed and exalted by it. In Romans 8, Paul even speaks of a law of the Spirit, through which the “requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us” (8:4). The demand contained in the law, apparently negated in the name of grace, rises up whole—is radicalized—in its essential core: the commandment of love. Here we have a paradox, unthinkable *a priori*, of a law that is no longer a law, because the commandment it contains is no longer merely external to me, but comes also from “within” me: from within my “I,” which is now the dwelling place of the Spirit of God (Rom 8:9) and of Christ, who dwells in me (cf. Gal 2:20). The yoke remains a yoke, but it has become “easy” and light. Thus, in the light of the paschal mystery, the negation of the law appears as that which it is: supereminent affirmation.

*c. Recapitulation: duo miscuit speratum  
et insperatum*

What we have just said requires us to be more precise: if the transcendence of the fulfillment were such that this fulfillment were *only* “different” with respect to the promise, Jesus would be

unrecognizable. He would not have the right to ask for and even demand faith, accusing those who see and do not believe of sin.<sup>51</sup> Jesus has to show that he is *like* Solomon and Jonah (Mt 12:38–42; Lk 11:27–28) to be able to claim that he surpasses them: the process of transformation and “sublimation” of the figure passes through a first moment, in which Jesus assumes and recapitulates them in a sense that is as close as possible to their “old” sense.

Thus, before presenting himself as more than Moses (Jn 6:32ff., 58), Jesus performs the signs of Moses. Before presenting himself as the bread of life (Jn 6:35, 48), Jesus multiplies the loaves and feeds the multitude (Jn 6:1–13) just as Moses did when he gave their ancestors bread from heaven (Jn 6:31). Before giving the Light of the Spirit to those who believed in him, Jesus gave sight to the blind, fulfilling the word of Isaiah (Is 29:18). Jesus belongs to the time of the figures, to the kingdom of the flesh no less—indeed, much more—than Moses and Elijah. The power of Yahweh to heal the body was never so concentrated as in Jesus’ actions: “The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor receive the good news” (Mt 11:4). Only after he has said all this does Jesus add, “blessed is he who takes no offense at me.” He did not come to abolish the figures, but to bring them to fulfillment. Nevertheless, because he fulfills them by passing through death, we must pass through the scandal of the apparent negation of the figures in order to enjoy them in their fullness.

With this we have come to another decisive point: the concept of fulfillment is only really illumined within the concrete drama of Jesus’ life. The public mission is thus no less important than the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord, precisely because without the former the balance would shift in the direction of discontinuity; we would lose sight of the pole of continuity and hence of the indispensable mediation between Old and New Testaments.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Cf. Mt 11:2–6 and 19, 12:28; Lk 4:17–21, 7:18–23; Jn 2:11 and 23, 4:48–52; 6:26, etc.

<sup>52</sup>This is true in the parallel case of the anagogical doctrine of Dionysius regarding the divine names. The moment of negation (*aphairesis*) needs its opposite; it is valid only insofar as it follows from, without denying, this opposite position. Only in this way do we have a path to transcendence and not to nothingness.

We can summarize our argument thus far: the notion of fulfillment, in its dynamic complexity, can be grasped only in the light of the two fundamental movements of the economy of the Word: 1) a descending movement of the Word (*sygkatabasis*) “into” the figure, that is, into the historically situated, limited understanding of Israel (and of humanity in general, of which Israel is the paradigm), which sparks the hope that he is the one they have been waiting for (Mt 11:1–4); 2) an ascending movement “beyond” the figure, to bring it to the fullness of its meaning, which disappoints the beholder and puts faith to the test. Three moments in the life of Jesus correspond to this. First, in the public mission, Jesus places himself simultaneously within the “figure” and contests it. Then, the consequent “crisis” (cf. Jn 6:67–69) that demands a decision: attachment to the “figure” or faith in him. We can speak here of a *crucifixion* of the figure. Thirdly, there is an epiphany of the figure transfigured in the *light of the paschal mystery*, an epiphany that is perceived only by the disciples who “remain” in him despite the scandal of the apparent “collapse” of the figures.

#### *d. Coincidentia oppositorum*

But there is more. Dionysius’ “anagogical” logic proves fruitful also and perhaps above all when it sheds light on the phenomenon of fulfillment in cases in which the figures appear contradictory. We encounter these not only on the vertical axis of the passage from Old to New Testaments, but also on the horizontal axis, in the various apparently contradictory theological currents in the Old and in the New Testaments. If the reconciliation of such apparent contradictions is to be sought while avoiding the temptations of either remaining on the level of pure affirmation of the contrast, or negating its existence and affirming an “immediate” coherence that does violence to the texts, then Dionysius may have something to offer. The contrasting elements must be held together so as to lead us to discover, in the mystery of Christ crucified and risen, the supereminent meeting point, “the One that transcends affirmation and negation,” in the light of which and in which all the

apparently incompatible elements, while remaining distinct, prove both to be true on a more sublime level.<sup>53</sup>

A classic example: the God of Israel is “compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in kindness and fidelity” (Ex 34:6). But he is also just. This justice is a reality so demanding that it can be represented with a figure that may well make us uncomfortable today, but that takes up no less space in the Scriptures than the first: the wrath of God,<sup>54</sup> a wrath that is a consuming fire.<sup>55</sup> These two “faces” emerge clearly in the account of the Passover, in which the action with which God saves the oppressed children of Israel is at the same time his wrath, which strikes the oppressors with inexorable sternness. We could say hurriedly that mercy and justice are not mutually exclusive. This is certainly true, but the concrete details of the narrative still disturb us, especially since it is not long before Israel reveals itself to be no less sinful than its oppressors. How do we hold the two aspects together? If we move to the New Testament, the question becomes more acute: how do we reconcile the meek lamb of the new Passover with the destroying angel of the first?

First: we do not have to do so. We must take the two images together, in the certainty that if we removed wrath from the theological center of the “old” Passover, we would lose a figure that the new Passover must fulfill; we would render the latter banal, emptying the Love that is revealed in the new Pasch of its surprising supereminence. Isn’t the Cross in fact the “impossible” place where we (finally!) see the two realities illuminating one another? That is, we see both the terrible severity of the chastisement, which takes sin and human responsibility in all seriousness, and the sovereign meekness of forgiveness united in One because God revealed his mercy

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<sup>53</sup>“What has actually to be said about the Cause of everything is this. Since it is the Cause of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to beings, and more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being. Now we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of affirmations, but rather that the cause of all is considerably prior to this, beyond privations, beyond every denial as well as beyond every assertion” (*MT I*, 2, 1000 AB).

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Rom 1:18ff.; Mic 7:9; Zeph 1:15; Ps 85:4–6, 69:25, etc.

<sup>55</sup>Dt 4:24; Is 33:11ff.; Zeph 1:18; Mal 3:2, etc. For a historical study of the theme, cf. T. Römer, *I lati oscuri di Dio. Crudeltà e violenza nell’Antico Testamento* (Turin, 2002).

precisely in taking the chastisement upon himself (Is 53:5; 1 Pt 2:24–25; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). In this way, the disquieting figure of the destroying angel is also purified. This figure has to remain, as a warning of the judgment that awaits each of us; it is, however, no longer a terrifying figure because the angel of judgment is now identified with the sacrificial Lamb, whose blood protects and heals: “Since . . . we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9). Precisely when the two images are superimposed on one another without confusion, do we begin to glimpse the true light of the new Pasch. This light makes our hope something joyful and light, without negating the seriousness of each instant: the angel of death and the Lamb are One. Which means, according to the paradoxical image of the Book of Revelation, that there is also a “wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16–17), because it is Love that, in and of itself, judges us and will judge us in the end (Mt 25).

With the help of another *typos*, strictly connected to the Jewish Passover, we can contemplate the significance of this wrath within the new Pasch from another perspective. The Church of the first centuries saw in the passage through the Red Sea a prefiguration of the mystery of salvation.<sup>56</sup> In this episode, too, the theme of the wrath of God emerges: while Israel walks on dry land, the waters close behind them, drowning their Egyptian pursuers. This takes place through the “breath of Yahweh’s wrath”: “At the blast of thy nostrils the waters piled up . . . the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake . . . I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’ Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters” (Ex 15:8–10; cf. Ps 18:16). Just as at the beginning of creation God breathed life into Adam, this same divine breath opens for Israel a path to the promised land. But this is not only an act that re-creates; the “breath” here is also the breath of death, which annihilates the forces that oppose Israel’s journey to freedom.

If we shift our gaze to the account of the Lord’s death in the gospel of John, we find yet another “breath.” The expression John

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<sup>56</sup>Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Moysis (DvM)*, who sees in the staff with which Moses parts the sea a figure of the faith in the Cross (*DvM* II, 124) and in Israel’s passage through the waters, the liberation of the baptized from enslavement to the passions with which the devil/Pharaoh had held humanity captive (*DvM* II, 122).

uses to describe the event of Jesus' death, "he gave up his spirit" (Jn 19:30: *paredoken to pneuma*), is, as is well-known,<sup>57</sup> of great theological import: with it, John identifies the death of Jesus with the pouring out of the Spirit. Most interesting, though, is the question as to *why* he does this. John wants to show us the difference between this death and every other death. By transforming Jesus' last breath into an active breathing forth, John shows us simply and sublimely that this death is not simply suffered, but is sovereignly free. Adam lost his breath by moving away from his heavenly Father, the source of Life (cf. Gn 6:3), whereas Jesus' dying is a profound "going toward" the Father.<sup>58</sup> Better, it is the one within the other, because at the heart of his "falling away" into death is the obedient Son's active gift of himself to the Father. This is why, when Jesus plunges into the waters of death, they recede: "When the waters saw thee, O God, when the waters saw thee, they were afraid, yea, the deep trembled" (Ps 77:17). Jesus' last breath, which to all appearances is no different from that of any other dying man, shows itself to be a breath of terrible power: the "breath of wrath" that fulfills the Mosaic figure! This breath, which divides the waters, leads us from death to Life, and re-creates us by liberating us from evil, emerges from the gift that Jesus makes of himself to the Father and for us on the Cross. But "breath of wrath" means not only liberation but also destruction. What, then, is destroyed by the breath of Jesus? According to Gregory of Nyssa, Jesus' spirit drowns the army of the passions, which are the prison-guards of the true Pharaoh, the prince of lies. "With your voluntary passion, O Christ-God, you conquer our passions," we hear in the ancient Byzantine troparion. The meekness of the Lord who lets himself be submerged in the violence of our passions, is the force that sets us free. Is this figure or allegory? The distinction is not always easy, and certain "allegories" of the Fathers strike home with such accuracy that perhaps we ought not be in too much of a hurry to cast them aside.

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<sup>57</sup>Most of the recent commentaries on the gospel of John highlight this. Cf., for example, R. Fabris, *Giovanni* (Rome, 2003), 743; I. de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and the Resurrection of Jesus according to John* (New York: Alba House, 1984), 131–34.

<sup>58</sup>For this reason Jesus never mentions his death in the Johannine farewell discourse, but only his going toward the Father (Jn 14:2–4, 14:28, 16:5.7.9.17c and 28, 17:11.13).

*e. Love “can be said in many ways”*

If we obscure the various aspects of the “figures,” we lose even more than what we mentioned above. We can proceed by association. Already in the Old Testament, we find a “figure” that links the theme of God’s wrath to that of his love: jealousy. The fire of Yahweh’s wrath is the fire of jealousy:<sup>59</sup> he cannot bear that his people should belong to anyone other than himself. This has weighty consequences both for those who place themselves between God and the chosen people and for the people itself. The first, God’s rivals, become by their hardness of heart the objects of Yahweh’s fury. Woe to him who dares place himself between the she-bear and its young (Hos 13:8). Thus God descends into Egypt, to Pharaoh’s ruin.

What remains of all this in the new Pasch? Nothing. And everything. Nothing, because there is no literal extermination, except for the death of the Innocent One. Everything, because here, too, there really is a Pharaoh whose kingdom is laid waste (Jn 12:31, 16:11): the devil. This means that hidden within the meekness of the Cross, there is the devouring jealousy of Yahweh who comes to take back his own: “Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12:31–32). The quiet purity of agape is at the same time the flame of jealousy, which has the power to free us from every false love and to draw us back to himself. But the jealousy of God also means something more: not only does God have the power to set me free from enslavement to sin, but he *desires* to do this, as a jealous lover desires to carry off his beloved from his rival. Not only Pharaoh, though, but also Israel will feel all the weight of the Lord’s jealousy, for the redemption is oriented to the Covenant. This Covenant will very quickly become a burden so heavy that, in the midst of its solemn renewal at Shechem, after the war of conquest, Joshua will tell the Israelites, “You cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good” (Josh 24:19). Of course, Yahweh’s jealousy has nothing carnal about

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<sup>59</sup>Cf. Ex 20:5, 34:14; Dt 4:24, 5:9, 6:15, 32:16.21, etc.; Num 25:11; Ez 8:3–5, 39:25; Zech 1:14, etc.

it, but it is nonetheless a real and terrible power: “They forgot me. So I will be to them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rend them” (Hos 13:6–8).

At this point, too, the question arises: how do we reconcile this jealousy with a God rich in mercy? We could answer that, as in the case of eros, jealousy is an anthropomorphic image that expresses the seriousness with which God takes human freedom. We can also say that this image in no way damages the purely oblationary character of divine love. All this is correct, but have we really said everything there is to say? Have we really done justice to the disturbing character of certain texts? Once again, it is the new Pasch that sheds the definitive light. In the agape of the God who loves *eis to telos*, “to the end” (Jn 13:1), we see at one and the same time the pure generosity of him who gives himself, and the passionate desire of the Bridegroom who comes to make his beloved his own.<sup>60</sup> For *eis to telos* also means this: to the full perfection of unity (cf. Jn 17:23). In the mystery of the Passion of Christ, we discover that jealousy is another marvelous name for Agape (cf. Song 8:6). Once again, it is John who grants us a glimpse of this correspondence. Contemporary exegesis has shown that the significance John attributes to the thirst of Jesus crucified (Jn 19:28) is not merely physical: it is a thirst to hand over his Spirit (Jn 19:30b),<sup>61</sup> to give life rather than to have it. But it is a thirst, a *pathos* as burning as the thirst of a dehydrated man affixed to a cross.<sup>62</sup> Once again, the Cross unites opposites. God not only gives himself to me, awaiting my freedom, but gives and waits with a “hellish” passion: “as tenacious as the netherworld is devotion” (Song 8:6). But then, that which had been simply a metaphor for describing the suffering that passion provokes until it

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<sup>60</sup>Cf. Jn 19:39, 20:11–18. A demonstration of the profound spousal significance of these verses of the gospel of John is beyond the scope of this essay.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. I. de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus* (Cinisello Balsamo, 1988), 125–31; R. Vignolo, “La morte di Gesù,” 273ff.

<sup>62</sup>Obviously, in this Johannine perspective the historical and physical significance of Jesus’ thirst is no less real and important than its spiritual significance: if the first is not true, the second loses all meaning.

is satisfied, becomes literal event: the passion of love led God to the depths of hell, in order to seek and find his beloved.<sup>63</sup>

We could look at many other such pairs of apparently contradictory figures in the light of the paschal mystery with the same result: the vision of the glory of the only One. In this way, we also rediscover the value of a principle that, for Origen as for Jewish exegesis, was fundamental: precisely the “difficulties” present in the biblical texts are to be understood as the place where we must seek deeper “mysteries.” When they are placed side by side with their “fulfillment” and with other “figures,” the most disturbing “figures” receive new meaning, revealing all their anagogical potential. Nothing is more impoverishing than an apparently reasonable “selective reading” which, in the name of doing away with anthropomorphisms, is, precisely, overly human. Of course it is true that to speak of the paschal mystery is always and only to speak of the revelation of Love. But this is precisely the problem: “This is what we don’t know at the outset: what is love? In every typological exegesis, our certainties need to be submerged in the bath of enigma; they never emerge the same as before.”<sup>64</sup>

### 3.4 Guiding principles

a) *Condensation, interaction, conservation, transfiguration, hyperbolization.* Taking the balance of what we have said thus far, we can distinguish five principles that show themselves to be fruitful for the task of developing a theology of “fulfillment.”<sup>65</sup>

*Condensation.* The mystery of Jesus Christ is unique; it is the final Act with which the Love of God saves us. But this unique Act always exceeds a comprehensive understanding: it can only ever be grasped as the point of convergence of lines that have their source in antiquity and that precede and proclaim him. The paradoxical reason why we have to turn *from* the One *to* the many is precisely to enter ever more deeply into the One. Thus the authors of the New

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<sup>63</sup>Cf. on this theme Benedict XVI, “Message for Lent,” 2007.

<sup>64</sup>Beauchamp, *Compiere le Scrittura*, 233.

<sup>65</sup>We borrow the first and the fifth directly from Beauchamp, *Compiere le Scrittura*, 188–91. The third is taken from the exegete’s other writings; the second and fourth seem to us to be necessary additions.

Testament saw in the new Pasch the recapitulation of *all* the various ancient sacrifices (of praise, expiation, thanksgiving, communion, and supplication). It is not enough to see in the Cross the sacrifice of expiation; we must see in it also the thanksgiving of the Son who responds to the eternal love of the Father (Heb 5:10). This enables me to understand that the Cross is not an event detached from the event of the Incarnation and from the rest of Jesus' existence, because the existence of the Son in the flesh is in its totality an act of worship, consummated in the "eternal present" of the trinitarian conversation. Only the many permit me to grasp the richness and the beauty (for the beautiful is harmony, the unity of many!) of the One. This leads us to the second principle:

*Interaction.* This convergence does not leave unchanged that which I contemplate in the light of the mystery. The encounter of the figures brings about a kind of chemical reaction that transforms the "color" of the whole at the point where the elements flow together. For example, the fact that the Cross of Christ is simultaneously a petition raised to God to obtain pardon for sins and a holocaust of praise tells me something about the inexpressible coexistence of joy and sadness, freedom and tremendous necessity that is found within the abyss of the Cross. Paul is aware of this and, as if by assimilation, lives out this paradox in his flesh (2 Cor 3–5, 6:10, etc.).

*Conservation.* For the above to be possible, the abiding distinctness and clear determination of the different elements that are to be unified is indispensable. Only in this way does the anagogical sense become, not something imposed on the figure from the outside, but a light that radiates from within the biblical word.

*Transfiguration.* While the figure is retained, it undergoes the transfiguration we mentioned earlier. In the voluntary identification of the high priest with sacrifice (Heb 9:23–28), the conception of sacrifice is transformed *ab imis*.

*Hyperbolization.* This transformation occurs not only in the sense of a spiritualization. The typological fulfillment often, paradoxically, has the effect of an exaggeration and "literalization" of the figure that goes hand in hand with the passage to a more spiritual meaning. What we saw at work in the example of "hellish" passion holds true also for the theme of sacrifice. It is not correct to say only that Jesus "spiritualizes" the Old Testament concept of sacrifice. In

this he would be simply following in the footsteps of the prophets.<sup>66</sup> The real novelty lies in the fact that Jesus spiritualizes the figures of the sacrificial rites precisely by carrying them out in the most radically material sense: he himself becomes the lamb that is slain (Jn 1:29, 19:36; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pt 1:19) and the goat sacrificed in expiation for sin (Rom 3:21; Heb 9:11–14). On the one hand, the sacrifice becomes such because of the free self-gift of the victim, who transforms his own blood poured out into a gift of love (Heb 9:14, in line with the prophets); and on the other hand it remains a sacrifice accomplished in blood, as the priestly code demands (Heb 9:22).

b) *Apropos of hyperbole: spiritual does not mean incorporeal.* This last observation allows us to clarify an important point with respect to what we mean by the term, “spiritual.” The latter does not necessarily signify a passage from the carnal-material to the incorporeal. On the one hand, it is certainly true that the transformation of the figure is often understood as a transposition from the visible to the invisible-spiritual. For example, the theme of kingship, which occupies a central place in the narrative of the Passion in John’s gospel,<sup>67</sup> is obviously understood by the evangelist in a spiritual and not a material sense. Jesus’ power and majesty are those of absolute Love, which reveals itself precisely in the voluntary humiliation of the Cross. And yet the opposite is also true. The fruit of Love is the reception of glory and of a genuine, universal power; it is an exaltation that fulfills the prophecies contained in the messianic psalms, granting them a sense more literal than that which the psalmist had in mind.<sup>68</sup> Both, then, are true: the sense of glorification is “spiritualized” in the paschal mystery, because here we have a kingly glory that comes from the humility of agape. At the same time, this glorification is materialized to the extreme, because we are also dealing here with a bodily glorification and a truly universal lordship. Thus, while it is right to say that the New Testament involves a spiritualization of that which had been “carnal,” we must immediately offer this clarification: this means a passage to the *total fullness of meaning contained in the figure*. This fullness involves not only its transformation in the direction of interiorization, but also its

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<sup>66</sup>Is 1:11–13; Ps 40:7–8; Am 5:21–22; Hos 8:13, etc.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. I. de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus*, 4–8, 14–16, 65–74.

<sup>68</sup>Cf. PBC 1993, II.B.2.

opposite: a greater incarnation of that which previously had been metaphorical or spiritual.

With respect to this “aesthetic surprise,” perhaps the most interesting kind of typology is precisely that in which the two phenomena (literalization and spiritualization) are not only associated, but support and even cause one another. We witness this dynamic in Jesus’ bread of life discourse in John 6, with respect to the theme of Wisdom. In this text, Jesus identifies himself not only with the manna, but also with Wisdom.<sup>69</sup> Jesus claims to possess a wisdom more perfect than that described by Sirach: the man who nourishes himself with that Wisdom will still “hunger” and “thirst,” whereas “he who comes to me will no longer hunger and he who believes in me will never thirst” (Jn 6:35). Up to, and including, this point what Jesus says seems daring, but not yet incomprehensible. But he goes further, and the metaphor suddenly takes on an inconceivable literalness: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you . . . . For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink . . . . He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (Jn 6:53, 55–56). This means: “you can acquire the most sublime Wisdom not so much through a study of the Torah as by means of an entirely material ‘wine.’ This wine is a man’s—my—blood.” Nothing is more simple and “lowly.” And at the same time nothing is more difficult and “sublime” than this corporeality.

#### *4. Discontinuity as the place of freedom in the hermeneutical act*

A word remains to be said regarding the role of the interpreter in the hermeneutical act that grasps the “fulfillment.” The fact that there is a veil between figure and fulfillment necessarily implies that, in the event of “recognition,” the orientation of the interpreter’s freedom plays a role that cannot be replaced by any method.

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<sup>69</sup>Sir 24:19–22: “Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my produce. For the remembrance of me is sweeter than honey, and my inheritance sweeter than the honeycomb. Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more. Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who work with my help will not sin.”

The figure invites; it does not oblige. The fourth song of the Suffering Servant seems to fit its fulfillment perfectly, but only after the fact. It can be read differently, and in fact no one at the time knew how to “read” what was happening in the light of this text of Isaiah.

In synthesis, the decision of faith is inexorably personal and non-substitutable. It can be so only when it faces both of these elements together: continuity or correspondence with respect to the expectation, which prompts a “yes,” *and* transcendence or difference vis-à-vis the form of this expectation, which produces astonishment or scandal, according to the position of the heart (Lk 2:34–35). All of this explains why reading the Scriptures in the light of Christ, as Beauchamp explains, cannot be the fruit of an exclusively “scientific” study of the biblical text:

The freedom of reading the texts in the light of Christ is exercised on a different plane than academic, scientific knowledge, even as it is in the interest of the former to nourish itself with the latter and to practice it. Nevertheless, we must know that, exactly as every other worldly power, science lays claim to more than can be granted to it, that is to say: everything. Without an epistemological shift that allows for personal risk, the affirmation that the Old and New Testaments illumine one another in such a way that they give rise to faith in Jesus cannot attain all its relevance.<sup>70</sup>

This means that unity can only be attained through the leap of faith, which is suggested but not imposed by the convergence and the tensions of the “many” in their relationship with the One, who proclaims himself to be their unifying center. Obviously, such a claim implies a serious, attentive, passionate study of the texts with the instruments that each interpreter has at his disposal. We might mention here, too, the role of prayer and ecclesial life in general in refining the interpreter’s spiritual “vision,” a theme very dear to the Fathers, though one we cannot develop for lack of space.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Beauchamp, “Lecture christique,” 112–13.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. I. Gargano, *La teoria di Gregorio di Nissa sul Cantico dei Cantici. Indagine su alcune indicazioni di metodo esegetico* (Rome, 1981).

5. Conclusion: the delight of recognition

In conclusion, we can affirm that we do not recognize Jesus Christ as the awaited one by searching the Scriptures; we recognize him because we have encountered him and have been conquered by the attractiveness that radiates from his person (cf. Jn 1:35–51). Nevertheless, in a second moment, it is right to fix one's gaze on the promises and figures that he fulfills, which allow us to renew and to deepen our initial astonishment—this precisely thanks to (and not in spite of) the distance between image and fulfillment. What we are dealing with here is something not unlike the *anagnorisis* of ancient theater.<sup>72</sup> We find an instance of this in chapter 24 of Luke's gospel. Isn't the fire that burns in the hearts of the disciples, when Jesus explains the Scriptures to them on the way to Emmaus, the kind of elation one feels when the face of a beloved person suddenly emerges in the midst of an anonymous crowd? But the analogy remains insufficient, for here, the beloved face is not hidden in one person among this crowd, but in each one. Hence the interpretative "spiral" that moves from the paschal mystery to the figures, and from the figures to their fulfillment in Christ, is that movement that allows us to discover the One again and again, always hidden under new and unpredictable disguises, in a continual renewal of the surprise of "re-cognition." Recognition, in order to be possible, requires both the identity of him whom we encounter with him whom we had sought; but also a difference that keeps us from recognizing at first glance him whom we had sought in him whom we encounter. If one of these aspects were missing, there would be no joy of recognition, since the source of this joy lies in the unexpected discovery of him who was sought precisely where he was not expected. This is why the figures that seem most distant from the fulfillment are the most beautiful—are those that grant supreme delight—once they come to the Light that had been hidden in them.

It is not by chance that, if we exclude the apparitions to the assembly of the disciples, the other encounters with the risen Lord in Luke and John are not "immediate" (Jn 20:15–16, 21:4–7; Lk

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* II, A 3d. Aristotle defines *anagnorisis* as "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune." Aristotle was the first writer to discuss the uses of *anagnorisis*, and considered it the mark of a superior tragedy.

24:16). They pass through the “hiddenness” that is the condition for the greater joy of re-cognition. He is always there, where he was not expected. And in this way, he is always surprising, that is, the one who is continually being lost, sought, and not found (Song 3:1–3; Jn 20:13–15), and then suddenly found anew, in the most improbable sign. Isn’t Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the “gardener” by the tomb perhaps an allusion to Adam, whom God himself placed in the garden on the sixth day of creation to “keep it” (Gn 2:15)? But then, isn’t the Magdalene the new Eve, the Bride of the new Adam, and the garden the new Eden? Paradoxically, it is precisely in these most ancient figures that, when they are searched with eyes that have been cleansed by the tears of desire (Jn 20:11, 15), the “new” can appear. Certainly, what prompts the joy is the unexpected discovery that the gardener is Jesus. But this excess of joy is all the greater, the greater the difference between him whom we awaited and the disguise he put on in order to come and meet us. “The same, differently”: is this not perhaps the name most proper to the newness that makes our hearts and our minds leap with delight, and that grants us the kiss of joy?—*Translated by Michelle K. Borrás.* □

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