

# *Jesus the Savior: Soteriology and the Stages of Meaning*

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Since, as Professor Bernard Cooke once remarked, in theology everything leads to everything else, the invitation to speak on salvation from a Roman Catholic perspective calls forth an array of possibilities. Indeed, salvation stems from God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, it initiates a transformation thematized in terms of sin and grace, and that transformation becomes definitive in the *eschaton*. Among these possibilities I have chosen to focus on what has by convention come to be designated as the doctrine of the work of Christ, soteriology, which since medieval scholasticism has been perhaps too neatly differentiated from Christology, the doctrine of the person of Christ.

Roman Catholic theology, it is no secret, has been in ferment—creative in the view of some, lamentable for others—since the rapid disappearance of the dominant neoscholastic paradigm in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Paradigms may shift, however, and

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yet the theological task remains a constant, and I find that Bernard Lonergan encapsulated that task well in the opening sentence of his book *Method in Theology*, where he writes that “theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion within that matrix.”<sup>1</sup>

One other aspect of Lonergan’s thought will inform this paper. The emergence of historical consciousness starting in the seventeenth century has by now all but swept away the classicism whereby participants in Western culture accorded normative superiority to their tradition and its achievements, denigrating others as barbaric or primitive. An empirical understanding of culture as the set of meanings and values that in fact informs a way of living now holds sway, and for all the complexities of the culture wars that have erupted of late on the American intellectual landscape, a new posture of openness and appreciation for the rich diversity of human cultures has succeeded the previous classicism.

Among the many questions this development poses to Christian theology, one concerns its own history. Does the history of theology display simply a succession of more or less successful inculturations of the Christian religion to the series of cultural situations in which it has found itself over the two millennia of its existence? Surely it displays at least that. But can one also, without betraying either some lingering form of classicism or a naïve exaltation of the present, discern a thread of progress running through that history?

Within the context of this question, I find that Lonergan’s notion of what he terms *stages of meaning* becomes interesting.<sup>2</sup> Hence, as a test case for the notion, I would like to explore how this notion may both illuminate the development of the Christian soteriological tradition<sup>3</sup> and clarify the present theological task of mediating Christ’s redemptive significance in the contemporary cultural matrix. This will, of course, demand painting in fairly broad strokes. What follows, then, is a tripartite suggestion that Christian soteriology took its rise with an initial, common sense mediation of the redemptive significance of Jesus of Nazareth; it then advanced beyond common sense to a systematic-theoretic mediation of that same meaning; and it has subsequently been moving into a further mode of understanding contingent upon

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the differentiation, beyond the realms of common sense and theory, of the realm of interiority.

This suggestion will be concretized by attending first to Jesus, the New Testament, and Irenaeus of Lyons; second to Anselm of Canterbury; and third to Martin Luther and Friedrich Schleiermacher. The superstructure governing this choice of representative figures lies in the succession of stages of meaning, each of which can be defined by a question or set of questions that, when answered, opens up a further set that requires a different mode of thought and thus propels theological inquiry into the succeeding stage. To anticipate, our questions will be basically three: first, what's the story? Second, how is the plot of the story intelligible? Third, what generates the story and makes it a saving story?

*The Symbolic Consciousness of Religious Common Sense:  
Jesus, the New Testament, and Irenaeus of Lyons*

Jesus<sup>4</sup> proclaimed and enacted the nearness of the kingdom or reign of God, choosing from His religious heritage as His central symbol an image capable of evoking His people's hopes and desires for a solution to the problem of evil and for their ultimate fulfillment as human beings in community. Addressing that interest in His discourse and activity, in His parables and aphorisms, in His ministry of healing and exorcism, and in His practice of associating and dining with those whom the world of His day marginalized, Jesus evoked anticipatory experiences of the liberating fulfillment His symbol promised.

Some responded positively to Jesus's good news and underwent conversion, *metanoia*, the reorientation of mind and heart effected by acceptance of His offer of what Paul would describe as God's love flooding our hearts with the gift of God's Holy Spirit (see Romans 5:5). Others, however, clung to worlds based on realities other than the reality of Jesus's God, worlds based on wealth, power, and status, and they reacted with hostility to the challenge Jesus mounted to those worlds. Eventually their defense turned violent, and they killed Him.

God, however, raised Jesus from the dead and manifested Him to His disciples. God raised Him, a metaphor for God's literally unimaginable act, beyond the world of space and time, whereby God

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brought Jesus to that definitive closeness to God which constitutes ultimate human fulfillment and final healing and liberation from all that in this present life renders human beings unfree and less than whole. With the Resurrection the kingdom of God had come for Jesus in its definitive fulness as God brought Him into God's *eschaton*.

In manifesting the risen Jesus to His disciples, God renewed and, in one sense, completed their conversion; by the gift of God's Spirit and in the light of God's love they were enabled to discern God's self-disclosure and self-communication in Jesus's life, death, and Resurrection. At the same time they received the task of communicating Jesus's revelatory and salvific impact to others, and thus began the Christological process that would issue in the writings eventually canonized as the New Testament.

In order to articulate and evoke their experience of His religious significance, Jesus's disciples naturally turned to the religious tradition they shared with Him, inscribing the story of Jesus into the story of Israel and drawing from the latter the images and metaphors whose symbolic valence served to integrate psyche, mind, and heart within the new world brought into existence by Christian religious conversion.

Thus, in raising Jesus from the dead God sealed the passionate zeal for God's kingdom that brought Jesus into fatal conflict with the world of His day, and in which He persevered even at the cost of His life. Jesus's disciples found that faithfulness to the gift of God's love disclosed and communicated in Jesus both set them on the same conflictual path that Jesus pursued and freed them in a proleptic way from the power of the world that killed Him, while their present, ongoing experience of that love served as a pledge to strengthen their hope that in the end God would take them, as He had Jesus, into His final loving embrace. Thus, linking their present, still fragmentary and proleptic experience of wholeness and freedom to Jesus's faithfulness unto death, they resorted to a plethora of images and metaphors drawn from their religious tradition to express that connection.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for example, He gave His life as a ransom (see Mark 10:45). Like the eldest brother in an Israelite family, and like God in the Exodus, He had

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purchased them out of slavery—at the price of His life. Or His blood poured out on the cross was the God-given sacrifice by which, washed in the blood of the Lamb, they were reconciled to God. Or, joining battle against Satan and his demons, Jesus had won the victory that delivered them from Satan's dominion. He was now their heavenly patron, interceding for them at the Father's right hand. With this eruption of images the Christian soteriological tradition was born.

All of this is to suggest that in forming the New Testament, the early church met the Christological task by creating symbolic narratives, drawing upon their Jewish religious heritage to tell the story of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of Man, the New Israel, God's Wisdom and Word incarnate. Within those narratives, soteriology found expression at the level of image and metaphor. Furthermore, both the viewpoint and purpose of the New Testament are practical. Its viewpoint: Jesus's significance as grasped in the practice of discipleship, *quoad nos*, as Aquinas would put it, Luther's *pro me*. And its purpose is to exhort, to persuade, to foster the life of discipleship. This viewpoint and purpose, in turn, correspond to what Lonergan calls common sense,<sup>6</sup> his technical term for the differentiation of consciousness whereby one acquires the know-how that enables one to deal with things as they impinge upon one's experience, to make one's way through life. Concretely, in its content, common sense is particular to every time and place; formally, it designates the development of consciousness through which whole societies and their cultures are generated. Common sense makes the world go round.

In their soteriologies the writers of the patristic era<sup>7</sup> largely took up and expanded the New Testament imagery. Sometimes they seem mindful of the requirements of congregations for whom hearing sermons was, among other things, a pastime; one thinks of their theme of the deception of the devil, in which Christ's humanity becomes the worm on the hook of His divinity or the bait in a mousetrap. Sometimes they fall into literalizing the imagery, asking, for example, to whom the ransom price of our redemption was paid and developing in response a notion of the devil's rights that found wide expression until, in the Middle Ages, both Anselm and Abelard exposed its

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theological incoherence. Again, fully at home in Hellenistic culture, they could propound the notion that by the Incarnation in the narrow sense, that is, by the very act of assuming human nature, the Son of God effected the redemptive transformation of the human race.

Early in the patristic era, however, Christianity was almost engulfed by the Gnostic movement, and it is in this context that Irenaeus of Lyons finds his significance.<sup>8</sup> The eminent patrologist Johannes Quasten identified Irenaeus as “the founder of Christian theology” because Irenaeus “unmasked Gnosticism as pseudo-Christian” and in so doing emerged as “the first author to express in dogmatic terms the whole of Christian doctrine.”<sup>9</sup> If Quasten’s language of dogma and doctrine seems anachronistic when applied to a second-century author, his point was perhaps better articulated by those who lauded Irenaeus as the first theologian of salvation history.<sup>10</sup> The latter category suggests, as Quasten does not, the fundamentally narrative quality of Irenaeus’ thought.

In the proliferating variations of their myth, Gnostics offered a comprehensive account of the origin and destiny of humankind. In Christian guise they degraded the Old Testament and evacuated the incarnation of reality, all the while claiming to enlighten a chosen elite with the true meaning of the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. Irenaeus rose to this challenge by weaving from his sources in scripture and earlier Christian thinkers an equally comprehensive counternarrative whose plot was at once wholly traditional and equally an expression of his own creative originality.

For Irenaeus the cross of Christ provides the key that unlocks the treasure hidden in scripture (see *Adversus Haereses* 4.26.1). In light of the Lord’s Pasch, the unity of scripture comes into view as the story of the single divine dispensation (*oikonomia/dispensatio*), which, unfolding in good order through a series of particular dispensations, has been guiding creation to its goal. Since the beginning, the Word of God has been actively preparing humankind for His coming in the flesh. Becoming incarnate, Christ recapitulated every aspect of humanity in Himself and thus entered into total solidarity with the race of Adam. His life of perfect obedience led through victory over temptation in the desert to culminate in the dispensation of the tree. Born of a virgin,

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tempted, and persevering in obedience unto death, Christ reenacted and reversed the Fall of Adam and brought the human race to maturity, overcoming Satan and enabling humankind to receive the likeness of God for which it had been destined.

Thus, at Irenaeus' hands the Pauline notions of dispensation, recapitulation, and the Christ-Adam typology structure the true story of God and God's redemptive dealings with humankind, a story that integrates Old and New Testaments and comprehends the entire sweep of history from creation until the *eschaton*. Irenaeus' significance, then, rests first of all on this artifact, the comprehensive foundation-myth that evokes and expresses the world within which Christians dwell. As for His soteriology, it consists first of all in this story of salvation that, when appropriated in faith, becomes a saving story.

There is also the soteriology within Irenaeus' story. On this topic J. P. Jossua remarked almost a half century ago that despite an abundance of scholarly analyses of the topic, no final conclusion was yet in sight.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this state of affairs is permanent and inevitable. Gustaf Aulén, of course, in his influential *Christus Victor*, assigned Irenaeus a pivotal and exemplary role in elucidating the theme that gave Aulén his title, and that which he proposed as the authentic view of the New Testament, Fathers, and Martin Luther.<sup>12</sup> Now one finds clear instances of the *Christus Victor* theme in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*; it occurs for example, when he enumerates the salvific effects of Christ's passion (2.20.3), in the preface to the fifth and final book of the work, and in Irenaeus' account of the temptation in the desert (5.21-1-3). Yet each time it occurs, it functions within a larger complex. One also discovers that for Irenaeus the Incarnation is the necessary condition for the revelatory role by which Christ imparts salvific, transformative knowledge of the Father's love. That role culminates on the cross, conceived by Irenaeus in Johannine fashion as the lifting up of Christ by which He draws all persons to Himself. Within this larger context, Christ's revelation of the truth about God and God's saving intention for humankind conquer Satan by exposing his lies and thus depriving him of his power; the martial imagery of the *Christus Victor* theme is subsumed into a broader soteriology in which the practical exercise of discipleship, the obedient following of Christ,

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who was obedient unto death, forms human beings in Christ's image and thus brings the race to maturity, rendering it capable of receiving the gifts of immortality and incorruptibility for which God created it in the beginning.

Aulén's proposal of a single motif as capturing Irenaeus' soteriology founders, and perhaps attention to the narrative quality of Irenaeus' thought explains why Aulén's question remains open. The classical soteriological question asks how, within the Christian story, Christ effects salvation. But for Irenaeus it is no single element of the story that of itself effects salvation, not simply the Incarnation, nor Christ's ministry of preaching, nor the passion of Christ, nor His Resurrection, but rather the entire story, each part of which draws its significance in relation to the whole. Thus, Irenaeus's importance derives from the question he asked and answered as none of his sources or predecessors had. In response to the Gnostic challenge, he countered with a different answer from theirs to the primary question, What is the story?

### *Anselm and the Turn to Theory*

For the nineteenth-century liberal German Protestants who pioneered the history of Christian doctrine, Anselm of Canterbury's place was clear. On their account the soteriology of the patristic age exhibited an uncontrolled proliferation of mythic images, along with a slight tincture of Hellenistic philosophy, while Anselm was the first to devise a clear theory. For the likes of Harnack, however, it was an awful theory, casting God in the role of an offended *Privatmann*, an idea repugnant to both faith and reason.<sup>13</sup> So also a generation later Aulén, for whom Anselm was the prototype of what he termed the Latin theory of redemption; its chilly juridic categories lacked religious warmth and placed it on the side of *lex et ratio* in line with what he regarded as the tradition of legalistic Judaism. For Aulén any theory at all distorts and distracts from the authentic, normative tradition represented by his *Christus Victor* motif. While these negative evaluations rest to some extent on Lutheran dogmatic assumptions, Avery Dulles adds a contemporary Catholic voice with his remark that modern sensibilities find the traditional doctrine of satisfaction, the keystone of Anselm's theory, offensive.



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A more generous estimate of Anselm's achievement in the *Cur Deus homo* may suggest itself if we briefly recall the main features of his performance in that work. First, he asks not whether God became human but why. His question thus differs from Irenaeus's; Irenaeus asked what the true story of God and God's redemptive dealings with humankind is. Anselm takes the Christian story for granted, asking not whether the Son of God became human, suffered, and died for our salvation, but why.<sup>14</sup> Second, he reviews the prior tradition and finds it inadequate. Symmetries like those developed from the Pauline Christ-Adam typology of which Irenaeus made much do not penetrate to the level of intelligibility, the level of *ratio et necessitas*, required to untie the knot of unbelievers' objections; they are like images painted on water, *convenientiae* valuable to Christians for their aesthetic power but unpersuasive to those for whom the Christian story as a whole seems unworthy of God.<sup>15</sup> As for the traditional and popular notion of the devil's rights, it is simply wrong.<sup>16</sup> Third, Anselm sets out toward his goal by forging a systematic *Begrifflichkeit*, an interlocking set of technically precise terms grounded in a comprehensive metaphysical worldview. With this move he forays beyond the world of common sense into a world of objective theory, beyond the world of things as they impinge on one's experience to an ordered account of things viewed in their relationships to one another. As Aquinas would put it, he moves from the world of the *priora quoad nos* to the world of the *priora quoad se*, from the *causae cognoscendi* to the *causae essendi*, from description to explanation.

In order to grasp the intelligibility of Christ's redemptive death, Anselm appeals to the transformed Platonism that Augustine had bequeathed to the Middle Ages.<sup>17</sup> On this worldview reality is God's well-ordered creation, gratuitously drawn forth from nothingness and dependent on God for its existence and well-being. Within this well-ordered whole, each creature possesses a place determined by the purpose for which God created it. Insofar as creatures correspond to the divine idea in which they participate, they actualize the order of the universe and achieve genuine existence. Ontological truth resides in the essences of things, and *rectitudo* designates the rightness by which they correspond to the divine idea.<sup>18</sup> Among creatures endowed

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with free will this *rectitudo*, if chosen and maintained for its own sake, becomes *iustitia*. Thus Anselm forges creaturely existence, truth, rectitude, and justice into an interlocking, mutually defining nest of terms, and in the *De Veritate* he adverts explicitly to their systematic character.<sup>19</sup>

The purpose that defines human beings is to love and seek the highest good,<sup>20</sup> no mere Platonic form but the Creator God, so that loving God becomes obedience and total devotion to God's will. Insofar as obedience sets the human will in correspondence with its purpose, justice is established, human beings find the happiness for which they were created, and they add their part to the order and beauty of the universe.

At this point, carrying the Christian transformation of Plato a step further, Anselm highlights the interpersonal character of humankind's relation to its highest good by introducing a political term: the order of the universe constitutes the honor of God.<sup>21</sup> He draws the analogy from the feudal system of the day. The honor of the feudal lord is served when his vassals meet their obligations to him. This faithful service in turn establishes the good of order that renders possible the well-being of the social body. Analogously, for Anselm, human obedience serves God's honor, which is one with the order of the universe and which conditions the well-being of humankind and all creation. Whereas, however, the honor of the feudal lord depends upon the fidelity of his vassals, God's honor is transcendent, beyond the vicissitudes of human intention and deed, for even they are embraced in an order that includes punishment as well as happiness.<sup>22</sup>

Within this context sin becomes, ontologically, a matter of deserting the truth; it deprives the will of its rightness and renders it unjust. In this state one's concrete existence stands at variance with the purpose for which one has been created; one mars the order and beauty of the universe and violates the honor of God. Given the dignity of the one against whom one sins, the weight of sin takes on an infinity quality.<sup>23</sup>

Anselm finds that sin, thus conceived, requires some recompense to God over and above a simple resumption of obedience. This requirement is suggested by the feudal analogy of God's honor, by the practice of penance as both virtue and sacrament in the medieval church, and

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by the consideration of a human need: how, without offering God recompense for offense, would sinners find and enjoy happiness untainted by the realization that they had failed to render God all they ought?<sup>24</sup> Sin, then, requires satisfaction, offering God something over and above what one already owes God.

Thus, Anselm arrives at his famous disjunction—*aut poena, aut satisfactio*<sup>25</sup>—from which he moves on to construe the God-man's freely offered death as offering God the one thing not already owed Him. In light of subsequent developments, it is important to note that Christ's satisfaction, for Anselm, is not a matter of undergoing punishment in place of humankind. What renders Christ's death satisfactory on Anselm's view is its supererogatory, not its penal, character. A similar point may be made regarding Aquinas as well. On the one hand, ever since Paul, tradition identified death as the wages of sin. Aquinas integrates this traditional element into his appropriation of Anselm when he defines Christ's suffering and death as the material element in the satisfaction Christ offers God. They are, however, only the material element; that which renders them satisfaction, the formal element, is the love and obedience they embody, which, as Christ's, the Father loves more than He hates the sin of humankind.<sup>26</sup> In its original Anselmian form, then, as well as in Aquinas's appropriation, the theory of satisfaction differs importantly from subsequent theories of penal substitution.

We are suggesting in all this that Anselm moved soteriology beyond narrative to the mode of theory, and it is the difference between these modes of discourse that constitutes the difference between the object of Anselm's inquiry and the patristic materials he found wanting. Systematic meaning is what Anselm attains in the *Cur Deus homo*. René Roques, Anselm's editor in the series *Sources chrétiennes*, rightly points out that Anselm intends to do something other than repeat scripture and the Fathers because he is responding to a different need than they, to the specific exigence for intelligibility.<sup>27</sup> Responding to that need leads not simply to a difference in the content of Anselm's soteriology from what preceded him but to a difference at the level of what Otto Hermann Pesch identifies as the *Denkvollzugsform*, the pattern of one's thinking as performance.

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With Anselm, Christian thinking on the redemptive work of Christ advanced from the level of symbol, metaphor, and narrative onto the plane of a systematic, theoretical articulation of the cognitive dimension of such religious discourse. Theory exists, of course, only for the sake of the narrative whose intelligibility it serves and the practice that narrative encodes, and theory can in no way replace narrative; this would constitute a rationalistic distortion, a danger from which the tradition has not always been immune. Nor does the emergence of a theoretic theology open an escape route from the vagaries of history into some realm of eternally immutable ideas. No theory is innocent, and Anselm's satisfaction theory remains embedded in the historical particularity of his age. Given Lonergan's description of the mediating task of theology, this is not a defect but a strength. Anselm's theory of satisfaction clearly arises from his monastic spirituality and its practice of penance. Apart from that context, the concept of satisfaction also played a role in the feudal political order of Anselm's day, so that by introducing the analogue of God's honor into his *Begrifflichkeit*, he wins for it an important further dimension. The notion of God's honor is defined not solely metaphysically through the order of a hierarchy of natures but also politically so that the concrete social dimensions of sin and redemption come to expression in Anselm's theory.<sup>28</sup>

After a slow start in the generation immediately after him, Anselm's innovative theory of satisfaction found its way, not without adjustment, to the center of Catholic soteriology. It retained a dominant position for a millennium, and Vatican Council I came close to canonizing it in 1870. Anselm's significance, however, lies not so much in the content of his theory as such, even if one reads it favorably as a medieval transposition of the biblical theology of covenant, as in the performance that generated it. He devoted himself single-heartedly to come to terms with the conditions for intelligibility set by the culture of his day. He created a systematic theory that drew its life from both the spirituality in which he was immersed and the social order of his day, and that dual engagement rendered Anselm capable of thematizing, however indeliberately, the ineluctable links between mysticism and politics. This performance remains a permanent achievement and a paradigm for future efforts.

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Martin Luther and Friedrich Schleiermacher*

By Martin Luther's time scholasticism had fallen into a decadent state, and in a famous soteriological passage in his 1535 *Commentary on Galatians*, when he comes to Galatians 3:13, he launches into a vigorous attack on "Jerome and the popish sophists." His opponents, Luther charges, explain away Paul's clear statement that Christ became a curse for us. They propose a spirituality of the imitation of the sinless Christ as the outflow of faith informed by charity. But in this they are wicked and reprehensible, robbing us of our greatest consolation, denying us true knowledge of Christ, obviating the experience of justification by faith alone. Jerome and the popish sophists are agents in the work of Satan.

If it is clear what Luther opposes, the positive side of the coin has provoked debate among his commentators. Lutheran orthodoxy invoked his authority for a clear theory of penal substitution: in suffering and dying on the cross, Christ underwent in our place the punishment our sins merited and thus fulfilled God's justice. God's wrath being appeased, divine mercy could prevail. Aulén, we have seen, challenged this tradition. On his account Luther revived the classic *Christus Victor* motif, which, with its dramatic, dualistic, contradictory character, is no theory at all and not amenable to theoretic articulation. R. H. Culpepper credits Aulén with recovering a neglected aspect of Luther's theology, but he finds that penal substitution is even more prominent, so that a full account must simply recognize the presence of both themes in Luther's theology.<sup>29</sup> For Paul Althaus, however, because the notion of satisfaction predominates in Luther's soteriology, Luther stands decisively in the Latin line inaugurated by Anselm.<sup>30</sup>

Luther's text clearly exhibits instances of the *Christus Victor* theme, but Culpepper and Althaus are correct in also noting the abundant presence of the notion of penal substitution. This does not, however, warrant Althaus's judgment vindicating the orthodox claim on Luther as proponent of a theory of penal substitution. At the level of *Denkvollzugsform*, Aulén has it right. Luther's thought is dramatic, dualistic, and resolutely anti-theoretical. Karin Bornkamm observes how, in the text of the *Commentary*, Luther's rhetoric plunges his

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reader directly into the story of Christ in such fashion that the reader, by participating in the story, experiences justification by faith.<sup>31</sup> Marc Lienhard adds an important note when he remarks upon the astonishing degree to which Luther's personal experience enters into this exposition.<sup>32</sup> Finally, Pesch, at the conclusion of his magisterial comparison of Luther with Aquinas on justification, characterizes Luther's mode of thought as existential in contrast to Aquinas's sapiential mode, leading Pesch to suggest that in a sense, Aquinas takes up where Luther leaves off.<sup>33</sup> In terms we have been using, Luther operates at the level of the symbolic discourse of religious common sense, whereas Aquinas moves on the plane of systematic theory.

What erupts powerfully in Luther is a reversion to the first-order symbolic discourse of religious experience, discourse expressing the transformation of consciousness effected by religious conversion mediated by the Christian story of Jesus. Luther found in Paul the story of a conflict that pits God's wrath against God's love, curse against blessing, death against life. Christ, innocent in Himself, dons our guilt like a mask and in this guise pays the penalty that satisfies the wrath and fulfills the law. Thus, God's love wins through. God's awful wrath and accusatory law fade into the past, death loses its sting, life stands forth triumphant. For Luther, this is the story of salvation, and it becomes ours when we enter it by clinging to Christ in faith.

Luther insists that the events narrated in the story occur *hyper hemon* for us. They only occur for us, however, when they are enacted in the consciousness of the believer. Sin and guilt are psychological as well as theological realities, and the affective state of our fallen humanity perceives God, *quoad nos*, as an angry judge and implacable law-giver. Luther feared and hated this God. But when Luther dramatizes a conflict between God's wrath and God's love, he is not venturing a theoretic statement about God's eternal being; he is expressing the polarities he had to negotiate in the process of his religious conversion. The same holds true when, following Paul's lead, he asserts that God made the innocent Christ to be sin and a curse for us. Aulén rightly claimed that "theology lives and has its being in these combinations of seemingly incompatible opposites,"<sup>34</sup> opposites which, at the symbolic level, follow the rule not of logic but of psyche and imagination.

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Luther, then, is not simply recounting the story of salvation, as did Irenaeus, nor is he by any means seeking a theoretic articulation of the intelligibility of the story, as did Anselm. Rather, Luther's text opens quite directly, if spontaneously and indeliberately, onto the world of human interiority and the process of the transformation of consciousness that constitutes Christian conversion, the process evoked by Jesus that generated the story at the outset and continues to be mediated by it.

What we find spontaneous in Luther becomes explicit in Friedrich Schleiermacher; with Schleiermacher theology begins deliberately and self-consciously to thematize its source in the religiously converted human being. Of his major work, *The Christian Faith*, he declares, "This exposition is based entirely on the inner experience of the believer; its only purpose is to describe and elucidate that experience."<sup>35</sup>

What Christians experience, for Schleiermacher, is the work of Christ transforming their consciousness: "For the pervasive activity of Christ cannot establish itself in an individual without becoming person-forming in him too, for now all his activities are differently determined through the working of Christ in him, and even all impressions are differently received—which means that the personal self-consciousness too becomes altogether different."<sup>36</sup>

With regard to the question of how Christ acts redemptively to transform us, Schleiermacher distinguishes his account from positions that he labels empirical on one front and magical on another. Empirical positions reduce Christ's redemptive activity to the teaching and exemplarity that inspire us to grow in perfection; here of course Schleiermacher has in mind Immanuel Kant, who reduced religion to morality and theology to philosophy, and whose influence would linger on in such major nineteenth-century Protestant liberals as Adolf von Harnack. Magical views, on the other hand, posit a direct and immediate action of Christ on the individual in her interiority, a supernatural intervention. Schleiermacher seeks a dialectical mediation of this opposition. From the empirical view he accepts tradition and community as historically mediating the redemptive activity of Christ, but with the supernaturalists he rejects the reductionist tendency of the former. Exemplarity is too flat a category, inadequate to express the reality

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that the redemptive transformation mediated by the historical community is at the same time the reality of God operating in history and in the individual.

Schleiermacher had the merit of expressing a new question to define a further stage in the development of Christian understanding of the doctrine of the work of Christ. We have proposed that Irenaeus followed up on both scripture and his predecessors in fixing an answer to the question, What is the story? What is the true story of God and God's redemptive dealings with humankind? In forging his answer we further proposed that Irenaeus operated within the world of symbolic consciousness, the common sense world of religious experience. Anselm in turn answered a further question: Within the world of the story, how does the death of Christ, the story's central figure, bring about our salvation? Why is Christ's death redemptive? In his single-minded pursuit of the intelligibility of the story, we credited Anselm with transposing the meaning of the story from common sense to the plane of theory and thus enriching the tradition with a new mode of discourse that serves to clarify its cognitive dimension. In Luther we next found data on a further question that Schleiermacher posed explicitly: What is the transformation of consciousness, evoked by Jesus first in His earthly ministry and now through the mediation of the life of the Christian community, that generated the story, that creates the horizon within which the intelligibility of the story can be determined, and that provides the criterion for judging the authenticity of conflicting interpretations of the story?

If Schleiermacher identified the question, his own answer remained mired in the misadventures of modern thought since Descartes, justifiably attracting the critique of experiential-expressivism lately leveled at him.<sup>37</sup> Schleiermacher's response was encumbered by a truncated notion of truth and objectivity. A full response to his question remains still an ongoing task whose components are daunting even to enumerate. Bernard Cooke was indeed correct that in theology everything leads to everything else. There is a need for an adequate and nonfoundationalist cogitional theory, epistemology, and, dare I say, metaphysic to meet the crisis of the objectivity of meaning and value currently besetting our culture. Any account of human transformation



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will also require critical conversation with psychology and the other human sciences. Specifically, as political, liberation, feminist, and now ecological theologies healthily remind us, such an account will need to counter the social forces that would render religion innocuous by relegating it to the private sphere; there is a need to articulate with accuracy the dynamics of the social constitution of identity. All this seems necessary if theology is to serve the church and humankind in mediating Christ's redemptive significance to the contemporary world. As Catholics are fond of putting it, we need to do for our age what Aquinas did for his, with the caution that no individual is capable of mastering that task in the complexity of its contemporary form. Theology must become both collaborative and interdisciplinary.

*Conclusion*

We began with a question. Does the history of theology exhibit simply a series of more or less successful inculturations of the Christian religion in different contexts, or can one also speak of progress? On the account we have been proposing, the latter is the case. Christian soteriology begins with a symbolic narrative that fixes the true story of God and God's redemptive dealings with humankind centered in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The cognitive ambiguity of the symbolic elements of that story raises the question of their meaning, and that question calls forth the systematic-theoretic mediation of the story achieved by the medieval scholastics. But the first naïveté within which the schoolmen dwelt has been shattered with the rise of modernity. The empirical-scientific and historical differentiations of modernity pose a challenge that requires, beyond the realms of common sense and theory, a critical appropriation of the realm of human interiority whose operations give rise to both story and theory and within which lie the norms that govern our search for intelligibility, truth, and the good. Within the realm of human interiority occurs the transforming, healing, and liberating event and process of religious conversion, the *metanoia* toward which Jesus directed His ministry and which, in His disciples, guided their telling of His story and further explorations of its meaning. Thus mediated, Christian religious conversion constitutes God's salvation within history. It is identical with

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the saving grace in light of which Christians discern and oppose the reality of sin in its individual and macro-dimensions, and that grace, now experienced, is the pledge that their present desire and longing for God will find fulfillment, however unimaginable the manner, in the *eschaton*.

## Notes

1. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), xi.
2. See Lonergan, *Method*, 85–99.
3. For a general history of Christian soteriology see Robert S. Franks, *The Work of Christ: A Historical Study of Christian Doctrine* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962).
4. For a historical account of Jesus's ministry, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994, 2001). The present section of this article offers a theological interpretation of the historical data.
5. See Stanislaus Lyonnet, *De peccato et redemptione. I. De vocabulario redemptionis* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1960).
6. See Berard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, revised students' edition (London: Longmans, Green and Co.; New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 173–244.
7. On patristic soteriology, see H. E. W. Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption* (London: Mowbray, 1952).
8. On Irenaeus, see Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997).
9. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950), 1:294.
10. A. Bengsch gathered citations to this effect in *Heilsgeschichte und Heilswissen* (Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag, 1957), XIII–XIV.
11. See J.-P. Jossua, *Le Salut: Incarnation ou Mystère pascale* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 45f.
12. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969).
13. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. N. Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961), 6:56.
14. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.1; in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, ed. F. Schmitt (Edinburgh: T. Nelson and Sons, 1946).
15. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.4.

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16. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.7.
17. R. Crouse, "The Augustinian Background to St. Anselm's Concept of *Justitia*," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 4 (1958): 111–19.
18. Anselm of Canterbury, *De Veritate*, VII.
19. "Invicem sese definiunt veritas et rectitudo et iustitia." *De Ver.* XII; *Opera Omnia*, 1:192.
20. Anselm, *De Veritate*, 2.1.
21. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.1.
22. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.15.
23. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.28.
24. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.24.
25. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 1.15.
26. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 14.5.
27. Anselme de Canterbury, *Pourquoi Dieu S'est Fait Homme*, ed. R. Rocques (Paris: Cerf, 1963), 174.
28. G. Greshake, "Erlösung und Freiheit: Zur Neuinterpretation der Erlösungslehre Anselms von Canterbury," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 153 (1973): 323–45.
29. Robert H. Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 95.
30. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 222.
31. Karin Bornkamm, *Luthers Auslegungen des Galaterbriefes von 1519 bis 1531—Ein Vergleich* (Berlin: 1963), 166–67, cited in Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 273.
32. Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 274.
33. O. H. Pesch, "Existential and Sapiential Theology—The Theological Confrontation Between Luther and Thomas Aquinas," in J. Wicks, ed., *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), 59–81.
34. Aulén, *The Three Types*, 155.
35. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. MacIntosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), 428.
36. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 427.
37. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).