

from Logos and Glory
 Manuscript by Dr. Michael Waldstein

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a. The Use of Philosophy

The canon of Scripture developed in conjunction with the liturgy of the Eucharist as the list of texts to be read in the liturgy. The bridegroom's own voice prepares his bodily gift of himself. This liturgical development of the canon occurred in mutual causal interaction with the Creed, the Episcopal office and the theological syntheses of the Fathers. It is a strange irony that by insisting on *sola Scriptura* as a way of escaping from the allegedly corrupt tradition of the Church, Luther overlooked this crucial point and undercut the very roots of Scripture.

The constellation in which the canon of Scripture developed suggests that St. Thomas is right in seeing a close connection between the inspiration of Scripture and a particular charism of interpretation in the theological syntheses of the Fathers. "It is by the same Spirit that the Scriptures are interpreted and published," he says about this founding period of the Church of the Fathers.⁶³ The charism of interpretation (1 Cor 12:10), he goes on to say, touches the Fathers at some times and not at others. *Sola Scriptura* remains intact. "The sayings of the interpreters do not involve necessity so that it would be necessary to believe them, but only the canonical Scripture (*solum Scriptura canonica*) which consists of the Old and New Testament."⁶⁴

One of the most striking and widely shared features of the reading of Scripture by the Fathers is their use of Greek philosophy.⁶⁵ In order to clarify how theology's use of philosophy nevertheless preserves its essential commitment to *sola Scriptura*, St. Thomas writes,

[Theology] can take something from various kinds of philosophical learning, not because it needs them by necessity, but to make that which is passed on in this science clearer. For it does not receive its principles from other sciences, but immediately from God by revelation.⁶⁶

⁶² See below, pp. ###.

⁶³ St. Thomas, *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, 12.17 c.

⁶⁴ St. Thomas, *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, 12.17 ad 1.

⁶⁵ Here and below, "Greek philosophy" refers thus to the philosophy represented above all by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, who deeply influenced the Fathers of the Church and the whole Christian theological tradition. The atomist materialism of Democritus, the skepticism of the Platonic Academy after Plato's death and the enlightened hedonism of the Epicureans were, of course, equally Greek, but they are not in the same measure relevant for the reading of Scripture by the Fathers.

⁶⁶ St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.1.5 ad 2.

Although philosophy is not necessary for theology, it is inescapable. Any attempt to draw out the meaning of Scripture will inescapably involve the attempt to “make clearer” what is contained in the words and this attempt will inevitably depend on the interpreter’s intellectual formation. It will involve philosophy, whether one likes it or not. The question is not, “Should philosophy play a role?” but “Which philosophy?”

b. The Default Setting: Descartes

Partly due to their skepticism about philosophy in general, many contemporary interpreters of Scripture bring an insufficiently reflected philosophy to their reading. Given the dominance of modern natural science in the intellectual formation of all school children and adults, it tends to be a philosophy that uncritically accepts some of the presuppositions of that form of science.

The most important among these presuppositions is Bacon’s and Descartes’ thesis that the natural world is a mechanism grasped most objectively in measurable, mathematical terms. What cannot be grasped mathematically is not an objective property of the world. Goodness, for example, is not truly found in bodily things themselves. Science is value free. It deals with the facts as they are, with real things. Morality and religion bring emotions and personal values to these facts, but such emotions and values say more about the person they belong to than about things. One cannot argue from facts to values or the other way around. Science and religion need to be kept apart.

This form of the fact-value and science-religion distinction, which has been widely accepted by Christians as part of the dominant culture of the West ever since Bacon and Descartes and the systematic elaboration of their principles by Kant, is not only bad philosophy, but it directly contradicts Scripture. “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31).⁶⁷ If God saw that everything was very good, goodness must really reside in things, which strikes a deadly blow into the very heart of the Cartesian philosophical presuppositions of modern science or vice versa.⁶⁸ That being is good is a philosophical principle called for by Scripture itself.

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). This is why one can say with certainty that the first chapter of Genesis has formed an incontrovertible point of reference and solid basis of a metaphysics and also for an anthropology and an ethics according to which “*ens et bonum convertuntur* [being and good are convertible].”⁶⁹ Of course, all this has its own significance for theology as well, and above all for the theology of the body (TOB 2:5).

⁶⁷ It is highly ironic that Rudolf Bultmann, who followed the example of his teachers at Marburg in critically freeing Scripture from the influence of Greek philosophy, at the same time subjected it uncritically to the Neo-Kantianism he inherited from those same teachers. The denial of the goodness of being lies at the very heart of Neo-Kantian philosophy. See Michael Waldstein, “The Foundations of Bultmann’s Work,” *Communio* 14 (1987).

⁶⁸ Vice versa. A substantial number of scholars in the Society of Biblical Literature are former Evangelical Christians who at a certain point abandoned their faith under the pressure of the philosophical presuppositions of science.

⁶⁹ See St. Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.5.1.

c. Pope Benedict's Regensburg Lecture on Greek Logos

In his *Regensburg Lecture*, Benedict XVI unfolds the argument that Scripture calls for Greek *logos*. The springboard he uses is the argument of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus against the practice of religious conversion by violence.

Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. "God," [Manuel Paleologus] says, "is not pleased by blood—not acting reasonably (with *logos*) is contrary to God's nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death..." The decisive statement in this argument against violent conversion is this: not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature.⁷⁰

Using the emperor's remarks on *logos* as a point of departure, Benedict XVI argues that Biblical faith calls from within itself for Greek *logos*.

Is the conviction that acting unreasonably contradicts God's nature merely a Greek idea, or is it always and intrinsically true? I believe that here we can see the profound harmony between what is Greek in the best sense of the word and the Biblical understanding of faith in God.

Modifying the first verse of the Book of Genesis, the first verse of the whole Bible, John began the prologue of his Gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the *logos*." This is the very word used by the emperor: God acts with *logos*. *Logos* means both reason and word—a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason. John thus spoke the final word on the Biblical concept of God, and in this word all the often toilsome and tortuous threads of Biblical faith find their culmination and synthesis. In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* is God, says the Evangelist.

The encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him: "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" (cf. *Acts* 16:6-10)—this vision can be interpreted as a "distillation" of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry...

The New Testament was written in Greek and bears the imprint of the Greek spirit... The fundamental decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason [in the New Testament and the early Church] are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself.⁷¹

d. Three Aspects of Greek Logos

Three aspects of *logos* as understood by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and the tradition of "perennial philosophy" that derives from them are particularly important for the Christian Tradition: the openness of *logos* to all of being; the absolute primacy within *logos* of contemplative or theoretical knowledge (*theoria*) over action (*praxis*); and the open longing of human *logos* for an infinite good, a good that constitutes a city as its supreme common good. On all three of these points, Wojtyła agrees fully with Plato, Aristotle and St. Thomas and disagrees radically with Descartes, Kant and Scheler. The

⁷⁰ Benedict XVI, *Regensburg Lecture*, December 12, 2006.

⁷¹ Benedict XVI, *Regensburg Lecture*, December 12, 2006.

fault-line lies in *logos*, with profound implications for “glory...full of gift and truth.”

(1) *The Openness of Human Logos to All Being*: According to Socrates, “Those who welcome each being (ἕκαστον τὸ ὄν) should be called lovers of wisdom (philosophers) rather than lovers of opinion.”⁷² Aristotle has a similar understanding of the universality of human *logos*. “The soul is in a certain way all beings,” namely, by being open to knowing all that exists.⁷³ To be rational (to have *logos*) means to face all being; it means to ask questions about the meaning, good and source of each being and of being as a whole; it means, therefore, to place no limits, to be open to infinite being; it means, above all, to welcome in a receptive and contemplative gaze (*theoria*), whatever being makes known of itself.

In Plato’s *Gorgias*, the professionally wise men who call themselves Sophists (in the sense of claiming to be actually wise) propose a use of *logos* as an instrument of the will to power. The point of *logos* is not to apprehend and express the truth of being and goodness; it is to gain power over others and thereby to win whatever prize one desires, victory over one’s enemies and, best of all, tyrannical rule over one’s city. When Socrates challenges this instrumentalizing of *logos*, he pauses with fear to examine the basis of dialogue (*dia-logos*, *logos between persons*).

I’m afraid to pursue my examination of you, [Gorgias,] for fear that you should take me to be speaking with eagerness to win against you, rather than to have our subject become clear. For my part, I’d be pleased to continue questioning you if you’re the same kind of man I am, otherwise I would drop it. And what kind of man am I? One of those who would be pleased to be refuted if I say anything untrue, and who would be pleased to refute anyone who says anything untrue; one who, however, wouldn’t be any less pleased to be refuted than to refute. For I count being refuted a greater good, insofar as it is a greater good to be rid of the greatest evil from oneself than to rid someone else from it.⁷⁴

(2) *The Application of Logos to Human Acts*: In the *Apology*, Socrates lays down the fundamental principle of his activity in the city. “The unexamined life is not livable for man.”⁷⁵ What needs to be applied to human life in this examination is above all the truth about the good, particularly the good of justice.

In the examination of life, there is a radical and absolute primacy of the theoretical or contemplative order (*theoria*) over the practical order (*praxis*). It is never right to go against one’s conscience and to submit to external power, to mere imposition of will, as Luther rightly insists at the Diet of Worms. Ma-

⁷² Plato, *Republic* (translated by Allan Bloom, 2nd ed.; New York: Basic Books, 1991), 480a. Quotes will be taken from this translation with occasional modifications.

⁷³ “ἡ ψυχὴ τὰ ὄντα πῶς ἐστι πάντα.” Aristotle, *De Anima*, 431b.21. See Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (South Bend IN: St. Augustine, 1998), 86.

⁷⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 457e-458a (translated by Donald J. Zeyl; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986).

⁷⁵ Plato, *Apology*, 38a. This sentence is often translated, “The unexamined life is not *worth* living.” In view of Socrates’ teaching as a whole, the principal point is the appropriateness of examination to the human person as a rational being capable of critical understanding. An unexamined life may well be worth living, but it is not fully livable for human beings inasmuch as they can raise questions about the truth of being and the good. To suffocate these questions is to be less alive as a human being.

nuel Paleologus says the same when he insists that we must “act according to reason, with *logos*,” not according to a mere will or appetite that is not grounded in *theoria*. Once *theoria* has grasped something of the truth about the good, it binds *praxis* to that truth.

In Plato’s *Gorgias* the Sophists hold up the ideal of the manly man who has big appetites and the power to satisfy them. Since he has such power, he is free, because he can do whatever he wants, particularly if he has become tyrant over the city.⁷⁶ *Praxis* has primacy over *theoria* in his life. Socrates argues in response that human freedom depends entirely on the primacy of *theoria*. The tyrant can only do what he wants if he knows the truth about the good. If he is deceived about the good, he might by mistake do what he would not really want to do. Not knowing the truth about the good, but having mere opinion, deprives him of freedom, of being able to do what he wants. The Sophists grant the argument step by step, but when the conclusion is reached they find it absurd. It is utterly opposed to their naked will to power.

One of them asks Socrates in astonishment, “So you would want to suffer what is unjust rather than do it?” Socrates answers, “I certainly would not want either, but if it had to be one or the other, I would choose suffering over doing what is unjust.”⁷⁷ The radical commitment to *logos* as the rule of life, the primacy of *theoria* over *praxis*, could not be expressed more forcefully. Socrates *did* suffer injustice when Athens executed him for denying the gods of the city and corrupting the young.

(3) *The Common Good of the City and the Infinite Longing of Human Logos*: The openness of *logos* to being as a whole and its application to human acts implies an open longing that cannot be satisfied by any finite being, not even by moral virtue, by justice. *Logos* reaches out with desire toward the infinite, toward the divine origin of all beings. The building of a truly human city must take into account, above all, the common good that is the object of this longing. This common good is what Socrates died for.

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⁷⁶ See Plato, *Gorgias*, 492c.

⁷⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 469b-c.

⁷⁸ The original title is *Politeia*, a noun derived from *polis* (city) which means city life, system of the city, city regime, etc.