

The Church as Pastoral Icon of the Mercy of the Good Shepherd

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THESE UNWORTHY COMMENTS rest upon an image I am bringing to a passage in Scripture.¹ I confess to committing an act of eisegesis. I agree that a *scientific* reading of Scripture should use exegesis, whereby a meaning is “drawn out” of the text, but I also propose that a *spiritual* reading of Scripture is sometimes of equal value, whereby we are “drawn into” the text. How else do we fuse our horizon with the eternal Word but by laying ourselves upon the sacred page? I wish to draw us into an image contained in Hebrews 11:1, where we find the word *hypostasis*. The component parts of the word are easy enough to see: *hypo* means “under or beneath,” and *stasis* means “a position or standing.” *Hypostasis* refers to that which stands under something, giving it actual existence and real being. This is evident in its Latin translation, *sub-stantia*. Thus, Hebrews 11:1 is rendered in both the King James and Douay Rheims translation as follows: “Now faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” But the word *hypostasis* was also used in the legal world to describe documents that gave evidence of ownership to a property, so The Amplified

¹ This paper was delivered in September 2016 at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome as part of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy called by Pope Francis. The XIII International Symposium of University Professors was on the topic of “Knowledge and Mercy: The Third Mission of the University” in “Celebration of the Jubilee of Mercy of Universities, Research Centres, and Institutions for Artistic Higher Education.” The theme at Holy Cross was “The Merciful Face of the Father.” This paper was one of three presented there. I am grateful to them for permission to print it here.

Bible translation says, “Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for.” The word indicates an emphasis on confidence and firm trust, which can be detected in several other translations: “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for” (New American Bible), or “the confidence in what we hope for” (New International Version), or “the assurance of things hoped for” (Revised Standard Version). I do not dispute any of these translations; nor am I trying to exegete a better one. They all work from the bottom upward: faith is the foundation on which is built the assurance, confidence, and substantial hope we have in the covenants and promises of God.

But there is a different image that comes from an etymology of the word *hypostasis*, an image that works from the top downward. I am going to apply this difference twice, once to faith and hope, and then to love and mercy.

G. L. Prestige contributed to a lexicon of patristic Greek terms, and at the end of his research, he wrote a book titled *God in Patristic Thought* that explains the theology of the Church Fathers by looking at specific words they used. When he comes to the word *hypostasis*, he notes: “The historian, Socrates, quotes Irenaeus Grammaticus for the application of the term *hypostasis* to the dregs of wine in the cask. There is nothing new in this usage, since Aristotle and Hippocrates are both quoted by Liddell and Scott as using the term to denote sediment. However, it also occurs in a wider sense to denote the underneath or hidden part of any object.”² In a wine barrel, some sediment settles (*stasis*) at the bottom (*hypo*), though most of the cask is liquid. Winemakers still today speak of red wines “throwing sediment” when they age. Something hypostasizes at the bottom: the free-floating sediment substantializes at the bottom. Prestige also finds this sense in the Clementine Homilies, which discussed the legend of Kronos and said the primordial substance “sank downwards” when it was devoured by the titan.³ And Hippocrates used the term to mean “a deposit,” leading the medical world to still use *hypostasis* to refer to “the settling or accumulation of blood in the lower part of an organ.”

Now let us turn back to Hebrews 11:1 and hear the verse with this wine barrel in mind: “Faith is the *hypostasis* of things hoped for.” Faith is the sediment of hope: the liquid hope solidifies at the bottom of the cask as faith; when hope hypostasizes, faith results; faith stands under our hope; faith is the substance of things hoped

² G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1985), 163.

³ Clement, Homily 6.7 (quoted in Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 163).

for. From the bottom up, faith is the ground upon which one builds a hope, but from the top down, hope is being given substantial form when it hypostasizes as faith. Hope settles at the base of our hearts and exists there as faith. Hypostasized hope is no vague sentiment; it is a substantial confidence. And the whole chapter of Hebrews 11 gives a lengthy rendition about people who had not just a general, liquid optimism about God, but a particular, faithful certainty in God: Abel's sacrifice, Enoch's translation, Noah's shipbuilding, Abraham's departure, Sarah's maternity, Jacob's blessing, Joseph's protection, Moses's exodus, and the judges and prophets who conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promise, and stopped the mouths of lions. These were substantial forms of hope. In *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI comments about the history of this translation. Thomas Aquinas used the terminology of his philosophical tradition to say that faith is a *habitus*, "a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see" (§7). Benedict thinks this modifies "substance" insofar as it is describing faith in embryo: there are already present in us the things that are hoped for, and that creates certainty. Luther and other Protestants took it in a subjective way to mean faith as an expression of an interior attitude, but scholarship today generally moves toward an agreement that Hebrews does not mean just a personal reaching out towards something absent; rather, Hebrews means to say that faith gives us something. So Benedict concludes: "Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a 'not yet.' The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality" (ibid.).

And here, at last, is my parallel application of this image to our topic at hand. As *faith* is the *hypostasis* of *hope*, I want to suggest that *mercy* is the *hypostasis* of *love*. When love solidifies at the bottom of the wine barrel, it is mercy. Love hypostasizes as mercy. Or, mercy is the substance of love. Mercy is how the general virtue of love is realized (made real, given being). Mercy is not a general love, it is a hypostasized love, having settled down with specificity to serve a particular person, a particular situation, and apply the love of God to a particular circumstance. Mercy is love concretized, instantiated, made real, substantialized. This is the understanding I see in Pope Francis's bull calling for this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. He writes: "In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality. . . . It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a 'visceral' love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion,

indulgence and mercy.”⁴ Mercy gushes forth from the bottom of the wine barrel as hypostasized, concrete love.

Pastoral Theology

I further suggest that hypostatic love—that is, mercy—gives us a description of the pastoral work of the Church. Pastoral theology is theology that occurs on the hypostatic level. Remembering that wine-makers talk about “throwing sediment,” I imagine pastoral theology as “thrown doctrine,” doctrine thrown from our creeds and our libraries into daily life. It is theology under the domain of prudence. There is a false impression that, when the adjective “pastoral” is attached to the discipline of theology, the former waters down the latter, or plays loose with orthodoxy, or becomes less rigorous. But this is not the case at all. Pastoral theology is hypostasized theology: it is substantialized theology united to mercy, moving from the generic to the specific question at hand. It is theology that shepherds (pastors) souls to eternal life. The pastoral task is aimed at priceless human souls and their communion with God. Jesus is the pastoral icon of the face of the Father because, as supreme pastor of his Church, he fulfills the two merciful tasks of a shepherd: protecting his sheep and leading them to pasture. The Church, his mystical body, is called to do the same. The Church’s ministry proclaims the Kingdom of God in real life: she proclaims the Kingdom pastorally when, through preaching and sacrament, she leads humanity to the pasture of eternal life. Faith and doctrine and theology are no less rigorous for being pastoral; in fact, they may be all the more muscular, if they are to conduct daily battle with sin and selfishness. The love that circulates between the persons of the Trinity is hypostasized in the Church, making her an icon of mercy. Both the *totus Christus* and the individual person whom the Church penetrates sacramentally are called to be an icon of him who is an icon of the Father. Each individual Christian receives grace in order to become mercy.

But this category of *hypostasis* does not apply only to our love becoming concrete. It was a term with Christological history and, so, applied to the merciful face of the Father taking human form. The word had picked up more precise meaning in the controversies concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation. After the grammar had settled, the Church could say that Jesus is one *hypostasis* with two

⁴ Pope Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae Vultus* (2015), §6.

natures, and that there is one God in three *hypostases*, and with this clarification, the word could be used in the defense of icons, where it distinguished nature from a particularly existing thing.

Iconoclasts had three main reasons for thinking that icons were being used idolatrously. First, if the icon represented the divine nature alone, it would be a violation of the biblical prohibition about making idols; second, if the icon represented both the human and divine natures of Christ, then the natures were being confused, as the Monophysites did; third, if the icon represented only the human Christ, then the natures were being separated, as the Nestorians did. They thought iconographers were depicting the nature of God, or one of the two natures of Jesus. Here is where the term *hypostasis* could help, because it named the distinct member of some group that shared the same nature. Maximus the Confessor said: “An angel is distinct from another angel, a man from another man, an ox from another ox, a dog from another dog, by reason of their *hypostasis*, not their nature and essence.”⁵ This can be applied to the Trinity: the Father and Son and Holy Spirit are distinct by reason of their *hypostasis*, not by reason of being different natures or essences. One God, three persons. And this can be applied to Jesus, as Theodore the Studite did:

When I say “man,” I mean the common essence [*ousia*]. When I add “a” I mean the hypostasis: that is, the self-subsisting existence of that which is signified. . . .

“Man” in general is a common noun; but the particular name, such as “Peter” or “Paul” is a proper noun. . . . If, therefore, Christ were called simply “God” and “man” in the Scriptures, then He would have assumed simply our nature in general. However, Gabriel said to the Virgin “Behold, you shall conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus.” So Christ is called not only by a common noun but also by a proper name: this separates Him by his hypostatic properties from the rest of men, and because of this He is circumscribable.⁶

⁵ Maximus the Confessor, quoted in Christoph Schönborn, *God's Human Face* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 104.

⁶ Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1981), 83–84.

All human beings have a common nature, but at that level, we could not distinguish one of us from another. The human nature we have is the same. But, when that nature hypostasizes, it settles into something particular, concrete, individual, delineated—it becomes personal. That fellow over there may be called “man” or “a man,” and if the latter, he could be named “Paul.” That carpenter over there, the one from Nazareth, may be called “man,” and he may be called “God,” but at the level of *hypostasis* he is “a man with human and divine natures,” and as such, he is named “Jesus.” The divine and human natures are in union at the level of person in a way that does not confuse the natures, or change them, or divide them, or separate them, as the Council of Chalcedon said.

Applied to our case, when love hypostasizes it, becomes personal. It is no longer general love, but personal love. Mercy is love hypostasized into something particular, concrete, individual, delineated. If I can walk past the beggar and not give him what he needs at the moment, my love has not hypostasized, even if I feel general pity for his state. That is the whole point of the parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus tells of a priest and a Levite who both see a man who has been beaten, and we have no reason to doubt that they were sorry about his condition. But Jesus says it was the Samaritan traveler who was “moved with compassion at the sight” and found his love hypostasizing from theory to praxis. This was clearly understood by the scholar who started the whole conversation, because, when Jesus asked him which of the three was neighbor to the victim, he answered “the one who treated him with *mercy*” (Luke 10:29–37). I can love humanity in general, in the abstract, but I am a neighbor only if that love treats an individual man with mercy.

Theodore says that a *hypostasis* is the circumscription of a general nature until it consists of certain properties. I say that mercy is the circumscription of generic love until it consists of certain properties appropriate to the moment, to the neighbor, to the need encountered. Mercy is prudential love, and the skill required to identify what circumscription is required is a skill called pastoral theology. In fact, this seems built into our understanding of charity. On the one hand, even those who have not studied scholastic terminology know that *caritas* means love, friendship with God, the third of the theological virtues. On the other hand, the meaning more often carried by the word “charity” is almsgiving, giving to those in need, concrete acts that alleviate suffering and distress. The word “charity” has come to reflect both the liquid and the sediment! *Caritas* is both the virtue

that takes hold of us as a second nature (*habitus*) and the charitable act done personally. *Caritas* does not remain just a virtue; it becomes an enacted virtue. *Caritas* becomes charity by passing through pastoral theology, like light passing through a prism becomes color. And at the end, we will be judged on whether the two facets of *caritas* connect in us: does our love bear fruit? So Benedict XVI says love itself will be our judge. “*Caritas* does not stand opposed to the law; it is itself a law court; it alone and in particular is the divine court of law: it discriminates between left and right (Mt 25!). Whoever loves stands ‘on the right’, and whoever does not love is turned to the left. Without it, nothing ‘good’ is good.”⁷

For a Christian, this charity is of a special character. It is not human charity; it is graced charity. Whenever we treat our neighbor with mercy, we are doing so as sacraments of love ourselves. It comes from the new *habitus* the person receives in baptismal grace. The *Catechism* says: “Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an ‘adopted son’ he can henceforth call God ‘Father,’ in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] §1997). At the bottom of the baptismal barrel, the sinner can find a substantially new life, if he will dive for it. At these depths, the power of the sacramental water corrodes the shackles of original sin that bind us in mortality and selfishness and regenerates us to new life. Jesus is the mercy of the Father, a hypostasized love who walks among us, and in baptism, we are given his love and life and pastoral charity as our new *habitus*. It is not just that we hypostasize our love. The point is that God has hypostasized himself: the Son, eternally begotten of him, became mercy in the flesh. The Church is God’s love hypostasizing. Once our soul has been healed of sin, then sanctified and deified, this new nature disposes us to certain modes of activity. Theodore went so far as to say that Christ and his painted icon have the same *hypostasis*. I will follow his lead and say that Christ and his living icons, the Christians, have the same *hypostasis*. We form one mystical person with Christ (Pope Pius XI, *Mystici Corporis*, §67).

Pastoral theology treats the sacraments on this personal level, not on their metaphysical level. Pastoral theology understands the hypo-

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 50.

static quality each sacrament owns. Marriage is personalized love, because a man does not love all women, but this one woman. Penance is personalized confession, because a person is not admitting general sinfulness but, rather, is asked to name particular sins. Anointing of the sick is personal in application because, although we are on a constant slope toward death, this sacrament anoints at the particular moment when we begin to be in danger of it. All the sacraments are given personally and received personally, but I would like to focus on four of them. Three give a character, and the fourth concerns a substantial change. The former will help me make a connection between hypostatic mercy and the iconic nature of pastoral theology. This same word, “character,” was used both in these three sacraments and in iconography.

A *kharax* meant a pointed stick that could inscribe a mark upon wax. Such an etching tool was used to transfer the outline of an image onto a board prepared with gesso by cutting the image into the board’s coating. The *kharax* produced an engraved mark, and an imprint that was called a *charakter*. Therefore, the term “character” was used interchangeably with the term “icon” and “image” to mean the defining quality or face of the one depicted in the icon. We may similarly say that the three sacraments that etch the character of Christ upon us do so because they incise Christ’s Cross upon our hearts; they imprint the face of Christ upon our faces, he who is the hypostasized merciful face of the Father. That’s going to leave a mark. A *kharax* leaves a character, which the *Catechism* says “remains for ever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promising guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church” (CCC §1121). Baptism, Confirmation, and Ordination are pastoral sacraments of ministry that promise protection in the vocation to worship and service. A Christian is someone who has been “Christoformed” by the third person of the Trinity at the directive of the Father. The Christian character—the face with which a Christian looks upon the world—is Christ’s own face, who is the merciful face of his Father. The Church must be merciful in order to be God’s image.

Spiritual Warfare

It sounds easy enough; we certainly desire it, if we are people of faith. But hypostasizing our love requires overcoming some hurdles called vices, or passions. Baptism begins an interior battle with the passions, and all the sacraments aid that battle, but that battle (which I have

called “liturgical asceticism”) will occupy our entire life. Passions distort our vision. First, they distort the perception we have of God. Like heat waves rising from desert sand will distort our vision of a distant object, so the rising waves of passion will obscure our vision of the Father’s face. We fail to read God’s merciful face, and instead read resentment and judgment and hostility in it. This spiritual darkening causes us to miss the merciful glances the Father constantly directs our way. And second, these passions also distort the perception we have of our neighbor. We cannot see our neighbor with mercy when we envy him; we cannot see him with love when we are enraged.

Evagrius of Pontus was the first to give a systematic articulation of the primary passions from which the others flow. His thought subsequently entered the West to stimulate its thinking about capital vices and deadly sins, but let us use his list of eight for our brief consideration: “First is [the passion] of gluttony, then impurity, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and last of all, pride” (*The Praktikos* 6).⁸ I want to ask, which of these passions cripple mercy? The answer is: All of them! That is the worst thing about the passions. All of them cause the twin effect of refusing to receive mercy from God and refusing to give mercy to our neighbor.

- Evagrius says *gluttony* is not so much overeating as it is lack of trust in providence. This temptation pushes concern for oneself to the forefront, so we do not fully trust God’s mercy to meet our needs. And our neighbor angers us by preventing us from attaining something on which we have set our appetites. Nervous acquisitiveness prevents us from merciful sharing with our neighbor. We are always building bigger barns so that we can lay up good things for many years and can eat, drink, and be merry (Luke 12:19), not knowing that this very night our life may be demanded of us.
- *Impurity* is the failure to observe moderation in soul and is an impediment to chastity. Impurity turns us in upon ourselves and stokes our lust and fuels our self-pleasure, and this adulterates our natural love. Impurity is countered by chastity, which is why St. John Paul II called chastity “a spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness.”⁹ Chastity makes for purity,

⁸ Evagrius, *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981).

⁹ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), §33.

which is why Paul Evdokimov connects it to the sacrament of Marriage: “Chastity signifies that one belongs totally to Christ, undividedly. For monks it is an engagement of the soul in unmediated relationship, and for the spouses, engagement through the *hypostasis* of matrimony.”¹⁰ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’s *eros*; also blessed are those who possess such a heart, for they shall be able to give pure love.

- *Avarice* is an irregular love of money or rank or knowledge. It desires something more than befits its value. The avaricious man will always feel a lack, an insatiability, no matter how many gifts he receives from God. Therefore, the avaricious man never thinks he has enough in order to practice almsgiving. If we cannot practice mercy out of our ten talents, having a thousand talents will not make it any easier. John Climacus writes, “Avarice is said to be the root of all evil, and so it is, because it causes hatred, theft, envy, separations, hostility, stormy blasts, [and] remembrance of past wrongs.”¹¹ Avarice sterilizes the soil, and no mercy will ever grow there.
- *Sadness or dejection* is described by Evagrius as regret for having started upon the spiritual path. For the monk, this may mean cherishing memories of his former life; for the secular Christian, this means doing our piety with regret and reticence. Then we act like a slave instead of a son. Modern psychology might call it a passive aggressive behavior: I will obey God, but you will find me grumbling as I do so. Only if we are freed from this passion can we serve the Lord with gladness (Ps 100:2) and, having put our hand to the plow, not look back with regret (Luke 9:62). If a person were conscious of the amount of mercy God had shown him, he would not be downcast. When he fasted, he would not look gloomy like the hypocrites; when he prayed, he would not be like the hypocrites who pray on the street corner; when he gave alms, he would not blow a trumpet before him, as the hypocrites do (Matt 6). It is hypocritical to be sad or dejected at the thought of giving piety and mercy.

¹⁰ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 67 (emphasis added).

¹¹ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 190.

- *Anger* is the most fierce passion of all, and it affects our relationship with both our God and our neighbor. First, before God, this passion sulks and refuses to accept mercy, as did the elder brother when he thought his father was stealing from him to make a feast for his prodigal brother. Second, before our neighbor, this passion sulks and refuses to give mercy, as did the elder brother when he thought his younger brother had trespassed against him in some way. The prodigal's sin was against his father, yet the elder brother nursed his own grudge. Any anger—be it indignation, or wrath, or vengeance—neutralizes mercy because, Evagrius says, this boiling and stirring up of wrath constantly irritates the soul. It is a desire to get vengeance and never to have pity. Pity, which is one of the first daughters of mercy, only tastes bitter in the angry mouth.
- Evagrius calls a sixth passion *acedia*, which is perhaps best translated as “despondency.” We might also translate it as sloth, but something more than laziness is meant. *Acedia* means a lethargy in one's spiritual duties. Mercy will not rise up from such a state of torpor; listlessness does not put mercy into action. The man who suffers *acedia* will find arduous the command to feed and water and welcome and clothe and visit his neighbor. Thomas Aquinas identified *acedia* with the “sorrow of the world” described by Paul in Second Corinthians 7:10.¹² It is the very opposite of the spiritual joy that accompanies mercy. The person who suffers *acedia* does not show joy on his face. Evagrius's list does not mention the passion of *envy*, but the western list of vices does so here, and the medieval preacher's manual, *Fasciculus morum*, defines envy as “sadness about someone else's happiness and glee about someone else's ruin and adversity.”¹³ Envy will leave the Pharisee unsure whether he is more angry at Zacchaeus for inviting Jesus or at Jesus for accepting.
- *Vainglory* and *pride* are the seventh and eighth passions in Evagrius's list. The modern world thinks of these as almost synonymous, but Evagrius has a difference in mind. Vainglorious people “desire to make their struggles known publicly, to hunt after the praise of men.”¹⁴ It is the desire to boast of one's achievements. When

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 35, a. 4, sc.

¹³ *Fasciculus Morum: A 14th-Century Preacher's Handbook*, ed. and trans. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1989), 148.

¹⁴ Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 19.

that achievement is salvation, then we are talking about pride. “It induces [the person] to deny that God is his helper and to consider that he himself is the cause of virtuous actions.”¹⁵ Together, vainglory and pride lay the foundation for considering oneself a self-made man who neither needs mercy nor will give mercy. The Pharisee spurns the mercy offered by God and locks the gates of his hell from inside his heart. The proud Pharisee boasts that he is not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, or like that tax collector who, unbeknownst to the Pharisee, is uttering the first instance of the Jesus Prayer: “O God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Believing that he relies on justice, not mercy, the Pharisee does not extend mercy to his own creditors. But eventually the king will “[call] in the man he had forgiven and say, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’” (Matthew 18:32–33).

This is our sad situation. This is our inheritance after the corruption caused by the devil in Eden. Isaac the Syrian says: “When we wish to give a collective name to the passions, we call them *world*. And when we wish to designate them specifically according to their names, we call them *passions*.”¹⁶ The world is the passions collectively, and worldliness is a corrupted heart that has been drained of mercy. The whole purpose of liturgical asceticism is the therapeutic purpose of recreating a heart of mercy. Isaac records the answer given by an elder to the question “what is the merciful heart?”

It is the heart’s burning for the sake of the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion, his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner

¹⁵ Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 20.

¹⁶ Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, homily 2 (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 14–15.

he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God.¹⁷

How shall a merciful heart be restored to man and woman? At every Easter Vigil, the Church reads aloud the scriptural marking posts leading to the Cross that the catechumen will encounter in his hypostatic plunge to the bottom of the baptismal font. Rising up a new human being, his worldly heart of stone will be replaced by a merciful heart of flesh. Then the catechumen goes to the altar to imbibe Christ's blood flowing from his merciful heart, to eat his own body, which he makes present along with his soul and divinity in the Eucharist. This is the fourth sacrament I want to look at.

The change to our person in this sacrament is deep and true, for it unites us with Christ. Nicholas Cabasilas speaks about it this way:

What a thing it is for Christ's mind to be mingled with ours, our will to be blended with His, our body with His Body and our blood with His Blood! . . . It is clear, then, that Christ infuses Himself into us and mingles Himself with us. He changes and transforms us into Himself, as a small drop of water is changed by being poured into an immense sea of ointment.¹⁸ . . . What, then, is greater than that the Father of the only-begotten Son Himself recognizes in us His members and finds the very form of the Son in our faces?¹⁹

St. Paul was right when he told the Church in Rome that God had predestined them to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). We are to become an icon of the incarnate icon of God. The unseen Kingdom of God is seen first in the incarnate Christ and then in the baptized Christian who dwells in the faith, hope, and love that are infused from his life-giving Spirit. The result of this inheritance is new eyes. We receive the eye of the Dove in the sacraments, tutor it in liturgy, and pastoral theology trains its eyebeam upon the world, and that involves the whole of Catholic education.

¹⁷ Ibid., homily 71, 344–45.

¹⁸ Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, trans. Carmino J. DeCatanaro (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 123.

¹⁹ Ibid., 127.

Theology in the University

I was invited to speak about the theological discipline, specifically liturgical and pastoral theology, but I am aware that this workshop occurs within a larger agenda. The letter of invitation said, “The organization of this event will involve all Universities, Research Centres and Advanced Professional Training Schools present in Rome,” and it can be “an opportunity to respond to the attention that the whole Church pays to the world of universities.” Thus, concurrent with this session are sessions about environment, architecture, bioethics, philosophy, communications, law, economics, social and economic development, management, medicine, psychology, education, natural sciences, social sciences, philology, history, sport, history of Christianity, and technology. What has theology to do with them? Does theology have anything to say to these other branches of human sciences, or does it stand isolated, in some remote sacred sphere lacking contact with the other profane sciences of the university? In closing, I would like to venture a thought about this, again using the concept of *hypostasis*, or person.

We are asking about the relationship between *gnosis* and *eleos*, knowledge and mercy, comprehension and compassion, expertise and empathy. A one-sided and superficial understanding might think we have to choose between them, either forsaking mercy in order to increase our stock of knowledge or forsaking science and technology in order to act more mercifully. But neither Pope Francis nor St. John Paul II seem comfortable with such a conclusion. In the words of the latter, whom the former quotes in his Bull of Indiction: “The word and the concept of ‘mercy’ seem to cause uneasiness in man, who, thanks to the enormous development of science and technology, never before known in history, has become the master of the earth and has subdued and dominated it. This dominion over the earth, sometimes understood in a one-sided and superficial way, seems to have no room for mercy.” Mercy does not require us to be simpletons, and science does not require us to be merciless. The dominion over the earth made possible by the university sciences does have room for mercy, and I will suggest that pastoral theology can aid the other sciences because it provides a liturgical anthropology under this category of *hypostasis*.

There are three possible ways to consider human beings when we train our eyes on humanity: we might focus *en masse*, on the individual, or on the person. First, we could regard mankind in general. Many ideologies have done so when they wanted to manipulate the

masses, and advances in science and technology, psychology, and education have made possible a political and social engineering of the multitude such as we have not seen before. Second, we could regard individuals. An individual is a part of the whole, a cell in the organ, a splinter off the stick. Individuals are distinguished according to the function they play in the group or the contribution they make to the colony, and they are considered only as a means to that end. Vladimir Lossky says the individual comes about by splitting and apportioning, by dividing and parceling out, by excluding and contrasting himself with others, which means an individual must compete with other individuals and is in perpetual conflict with other members. But third, we could regard persons, who are different from individuals in precisely the fact that they do not establish their identity by splitting and dividing and conflicting. Lossky writes, “a person can be fully personal only in so far as he has nothing that he seeks to possess for himself, to the exclusion of others, i.e., when he has a common nature with others.”²⁰

Where do we find such personhood? The supreme case is God, Lossky says: “The Hypostases are not three parts of a whole, of the one nature, but each includes in Himself the whole divine nature.”²¹ There is no conflict, no fractioning of the divine essence, no splitting and apportioning. Each Person of the Trinity is fully God and gives himself in mutual, personal relationship to the other Persons. Where else do we find personhood? In those created beings who are icons of this Triune God: creatures who, as *imago Dei*, are persons in the true theological sense. “A human being is not limited by his individual nature. He is not only a part of the whole, but potentially includes the whole, having in himself the whole of the earthly cosmos, of which he is the hypostasis. Thus each person is an absolutely original and unique aspect of the nature common to all.”²² Here is unity but not uniformity; here is uniqueness but not isolation; here is community but not at the expense of identity. This is our human nature perfected in the Church. By the sacraments of the mystical body of Christ, the Holy Spirit is at work in our person. We con-spire with him—we “breathe together.” The Church is a conspiracy of mercy. And the result is that the human person—the human *hypostasis*—becomes

²⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 106.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 107.

deified. The theological discipline tells all other university sciences what man and woman are destined for: full personhood. Evdokimov summarizes it in this way: “In every human being conformed to Christ the human person is the place of communion, . . . and, by virtue of that communion, becomes a hypostasis. . . . *The hypostasis, it becomes clear, is thus: the person of a deified being.* In Christ deified human nature is enhypostasized in a divine person. In the deified human being the created person, by its very deification, is united to the deifying divine energy, which is then enhypostasized in that person. The hypostasis is the personal presence, unique and incomparable, of the theandric life of each Christian.”²³

Masses are grouped, individuals are numbered, but persons are named. The person does not want to exist simply as an individual. The personhood we desire is not an arithmetical concept, and no person should be used as a means to another end. Thus, John Zizioulas concludes: “Outside the communion of love, the person loses its uniqueness and becomes a being like other beings, a thing without absolute ‘identity’ and ‘name,’ without a face. . . . Life for the person means the survival of the uniqueness of its hypostasis, which is affirmed and maintained by love. . . . The goal of salvation is that personal life which is realized in God should also be realized on the level of human existence. Consequently, salvation is identified with the realization of personhood in man.”²⁴

If we apply the distinction between masses, individuals, and persons, we can conclude that Catholic University Professors, whatever their discipline, should always align their studies with the revealed fact that man and woman were created as persons to grow into a theandric life. None of our disciplines should ever consider the human being as destined for anything less. Mercy must deal with one person at a time. Pastoral liturgy is not different from general liturgy for being vaguer, more ethereal, more practical; it is different for being personal. There may not be room for mercy at the level of the genus that operates as a blind life force; there may not be room for mercy at the level of the individual who can be sacrificed for the greater good of the hive; but persons will always deserve merciful treatment. The merciful eye sees past the generic, past the unit, to the person.

²³ Paul Evdokimov, *Orthodoxy* (New York: New City Press, 2011), 78–79 (emphasis added).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

When that knowledge is coupled with mercy, it yields Catholic humanism. Etienne Gilson defined the medieval concept of science by calling it a virtue, because a virtue, he says, is “the power to act.” It comes from *vir*, which means strength or power. (I imagine the medieval University Professor encouraging his modern University counterparts to become virile scientists!) Gilson says science is a power that “puts reason into a state in which it can judge certain objects of knowledge soundly.”²⁵ In other words, educators want to create a power of knowing—a *virtue of knowledge*—in their students so that those growing minds can simultaneously accommodate knowledge about earth and heaven, nature and supernature, the empirical and the spiritual, the historical and the eschatological, efficient causes and the final one, natural law and revealed law, knowledge and wisdom, knowledge and mercy, and what human wisdom has discovered about beings and what divine Sophia has revealed about the *logoi* of those beings. One can hardly call such an education narrow-minded. Catholic education has a greater horizon in its curriculum than secular education does, because liturgy has drawn back the veil of the hidden holy place and liturgical theology has learned the teleological purpose of each person and pastoral theology has the commitment to coordinate mercy and technology toward this one end.

Conclusion

I should not end what I hope was a respectable paper by closing with a personal anecdote that may make you look at me suspiciously, but I am going to do so anyway. Not too long after I accepted Fr. Giovanni’s invitation, he asked me for an abstract that could go into the general publicity. As you know, writing an abstract is basically writing the paper in advance of actually writing it, because, although an author leaves wiggle room for himself, he must determine the vision. And my vision of this talk came to me in a dream. An actual, nighttime dream. I am not prone to them and do not receive them with the rate of frequency described in Scripture, and I would not base my life on them, but you might find this one interesting.

I was in Rome in my dream, which makes sense. I was in a Roman plaza with a large pool in the middle, which is a common sight. But the pool had a life-sized crucifix laying horizontally upon the water. It was a pool in a public square, but it also seemed to be a baptismal

²⁵ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 262.

font. And Jesus was alive on the cross, lifting his head the way you might lift yours in bed if you wanted to see your toes. And he had freed one arm, like in Murillo's painting of Jesus embracing St. Francis of Assisi. We could psychoanalyze the components of my dream, but I think the real meaning of dreams is found in the feelings that a dream image creates, and the feeling I was given was that this Christ was not dead weight on a vertical Cross, he was alive and resisting and struggling to get up from a horizontal Cross. He was attempting to sit up—a slight adaptation of the Greek word for resurrection: *anastasis*, “to stand up again.” Jesus was sitting up again. And the first conscious thought I had as I came out of the dream was, “Romans raised up criminals on a cross so they could watch them die, but the Church is where Christ is raised up so the world can watch him live.” The Church is where the world can see the first effects of resurrection.

The Mystical Body of Christ, with its liturgical and sacramental and pious disciplines, is like a great contraption of transformation: knowledge turns into love, grace turns into works, self overcomes self to become *caritas*, doctrine yields mysticism, the passions become a merciful heart, hope is hypostasized as faith, and love is hypostasized as mercy. A sacrament is an efficacious sign of life overcoming death, a moment when Christ infuses his life into us. The Church militant is the struggle of the merciful Christ to rise up in us in order to enlist us into his struggle. The Good Shepherd rose up from Hades, where he took on the smell of his sheep, and leads them up a sacramental path whereby they are spiritually trained to follow their Pastor in search of other souls—to do pastoral theology. Each Christian receives grace for the purpose of becoming personal, hypostatic mercy. N·V