

Jesus' Cry on the Cross and His Beatific Vision

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MODERN THEOLOGY has focused upon the last words of Christ in the Gospel of St. Mark (15:34)—“My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?”—as a key locus of Christological dispute and interpretation.¹ Revisionist, enlightenment historians such as Samuel Reimarus have perceived in this verse an “authentic saying” of Jesus that predates the redaction of the Gospels. For him it is the indication of the Nazarene’s disillusioned apocalypticism.² Protestant theologians, meanwhile, have found warrant in this scriptural text for a theology of Christ’s “god-forsakenness,” experienced for us as a dimension of redemption. For John Calvin it indicates Christ’s state of abandonment as an “experience of the dread of damnation” incurred for us.³ For Karl Barth it shows that “our sin is no longer our own. It is his sin, the sin of Jesus Christ. God—he himself as the obedient Son of the Father—has made it his own. And in this way he has judged it and judged us as those who committed it.”⁴ This has led others to reflect on the agony of Christ as a mode of separation in the

¹ Biblical citations are taken from *The Revised Standard Version*, which I have occasionally slightly modified.

² The theory originates with Samuel Reimarus in his “On the Intentions of Jesus and His Disciples” (published by Lessing in 1778), and was reappropriated by theorists such as Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer.

³ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. F. Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 2, c. 16, no. 10–12, with explicit reference to Mk 15:34.

⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), no. 59, 238. This interpretation of the death cry is placed in rapport with Mk 15:34 on pp. 215 and 239. In the text cited above, Barth appeals to Luther’s expression of this idea in *On Gal.* 3:13; WA 40, 435, 17. It is noteworthy that he also refuses to see in this cry any form of “separation” in the Godhead itself (185ff.).

Trinity itself, or as an indication of suffering transpiring within the divine nature itself.⁵ It is sometimes seen (in kenosis Christologies) as incompatible with the “omnipotent” presence of his divine nature.⁶ At the very least, the cry of dereliction is often interpreted as an indication of spiritual darkness in the soul of Christ that is incompatible with any notion of a “beatific vision” in the heights of his soul. In the words of Jean Galot: “how can we attribute to a Savior who is filled with heavenly beatitude these words: ‘My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?’ . . . The cry of Jesus on the cross makes manifest the depths of a suffering that is incompatible with the beatitude of the vision.”⁷ Versions of these views, meanwhile, have become ensconced in exegetical research as now standard elements of Christological commentary.⁸

All of this stands in potential contrast to the traditional Catholic affirmation (found, for example, in Thomas Aquinas) that Christ possessed the “immediate vision” of God (or “beatific vision”) in the heights of his soul during his earthly life.⁹ According to this theory, far from knowing himself and the Father uniquely by faith, Christ in his human intellect possessed direct, intuitive knowledge of his own divine identity and will

⁵ For evidence of the former idea in the thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, see *Mysterium Pascale*, trans. A. Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 34, 101, 209; idem, *Theodrama*, trans. G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990–96), vol. 3, 237; vol. 4, 334; and the analysis of John Yocum in his “A Cry of Dereliction? Reconsidering a Recent Theological Commonplace,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005): 72–80. Versions of the latter idea can be found in thinkers such as Jürgen Moltmann, Sergei Bulgakov, and Eberhard Jüngel.

⁶ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1974), 205. Moltmann finds a basis for his interpretation in the above-mentioned text of Barth (*ibid.*, 202–3).

⁷ Jean Galot, “Le Christ terrestre et la vision,” *Gregorianum* 67 (1986): 434. He also says: “A Jesus whose soul would have been continually immersed in the beatific vision would have only assumed the exterior appearances of our human life. . . . His resemblance to us would only have been a facade. . . . What would become of the sufferings of the passion? . . . Not only does [the doctrine of the vision] put at risk the reality of the Incarnation, but also that of the redemptive sacrifice” [my translation].

⁸ See, for example, Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1989), 541–59; and Ben Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 315–16, both of whom appeal to Moltmann’s *The Crucified God* to interpret the cry of dereliction as an expression of suffering in the divine nature itself.

⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 9, a. 2; q. 10, aa. 1–4. Interpreting St. Thomas, I have recently proposed a theological argument in favor of Christ’s beatific vision throughout his earthly life in “The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision,” *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 497–534.

at all times, even during the most agonizing moments of the passion. In this way, Jesus could not undergo any "alienation" from the divine wisdom and will he shared in as God. Rather, his temporal obedience to the Father was the purposeful expression (in human intellectual and voluntary terms) of the unity of will he shared with the Father from all eternity. And yet, one can rightfully ask: Could Jesus have uttered the so-called cry of dereliction from the cross and simultaneously possessed such knowledge? Could the agonizing Christ have had the beatific vision in the heights of his soul?

In this essay I would like to draw some theological and biblical parameters for thinking rightly about the death cry of Christ and its theological significance. In the first part of the essay, I will appeal to theological reflections from Aquinas to argue that the final cry of Christ on the cross cannot be interpreted as either a cry of despair or of spiritual separation from God. By contrast, it ought to be understood theologically as a prayer of desire related to Christ's abandonment to the Father and his hope to introduce humanity into the eschatological gift of redemption. In the second part of the essay (drawing on the exegetical work of M. J. Lagrange, Rudolph Schnackenburg, and Raymond Brown among others) I will compare the final words of Christ in Mark with the "cry of thirst" that is its equivalent in John's Gospel (19:28). In doing so, I will explore three theological parallels that exist in both traditions and will argue that these reveal a common theological core present in the very different perspectives of the two evangelists. I will argue that the cry of Christ as portrayed in each of these traditions implies the presence of both expectation and agony, and has explicitly eschatological overtones. It is seen to usher in a new age of redemption that has already begun at Golgotha. In the third part of the essay I will return to Aquinas, and his theory of the "economic mode" of the beatific vision of the earthly Christ. Here I will argue that the "mixed state" of expectation and suffering previously discussed is entirely compatible with (and in fact complementary to) the teaching of St. Thomas concerning Christ's knowledge of both the Father and sinful humanity in and through his crucifixion.

I.

In the first section of this essay, I will argue that (1) despair and separation from God, if strictly defined, entail sin. They ought not to be attributed to Christ, in light of the Biblical affirmation of his sinlessness. They are also counterfactual to the reports present in all four Gospels of his praying at the cross. If this is the case, however, (2) a broader "analogical" understanding of "damnation" and "despair" cannot be attributed to Christ

either, because these terms can only be predicated of his loving obedience equivocally rather than analogically. Therefore, (3) the “cause” of Christ’s agonizing death cry in Mark 15:34 must be sought elsewhere. This cause must be understood in some way that respects the plenitude of love that informs his acts. Following Aquinas, the best recourse is to a theory of “theological hope.” The cry of Jesus on the cross stems from the eschatological desire and expectation that reside in his will in and through his suffering.

Hope and Desire in Christ’s Death Cry

There can be no question that, for the Gospel writer, the cry of agony of Mark 15:34 denotes the existence of tremendous suffering and agony within the soul of Christ at the moment of his death. What can this mean theologically? Here much depends upon one’s definition of terms. Some commentators seem to suggest that Christ who was without sin experienced pains of spiritual agony and deprivation of the presence and consolations of God analogous to that of persons in a state of sinful (permanent) separation from God.¹⁰ The suggestion is important and I will return to it below.

In the meantime, however, it must be admitted that strictly speaking, theological terms such as “despair” and “damnation” refer to spiritual states that result from terrible voluntary choices, which human beings must be enjoined to avoid. The modest presupposition here is that there exist in the human soul temptations to actions which entail serious privations of grace and can lead to permanent separation from God. As Aquinas notes, “despair,” understood in this theologically pejorative sense, signifies the voluntary refusal to hope in God’s promises and the means God provides to obtain the ends which are promised.¹¹ Such despair is a real temptation

¹⁰ See, in particular, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. 2, ch. 16, no. 10: “It was expedient for him to undergo the severity of God’s vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. For this reason, he must also grapple with the . . . dread of everlasting death. . . . Christ was put in place of evildoers as surety and pledge—submitting himself even as the accused—to bear and suffer *all the punishments that they ought to have sustained*. . . . He suffered the death that God in his wrath inflicted upon the wicked. . . . He paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul *the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man*” [emphasis added]. Calvin argues rightly (*ibid.*, no. 12) that Luke’s depiction of Jesus sweating blood (Lk 22:44) suggests something more than the natural fear of death. But is Calvin’s explanation of this mysterious agony appropriate?

¹¹ See *ST* II–II, q. 20, a. 3: “Despair consists in a man ceasing to hope for a share in God’s goodness.” All translations of the *ST* are taken from *Summa theologiae* (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947).

for the human person precisely because it contrasts with the hope of perseverance. The person who despairs no longer counts upon God to provide him or her with a concrete means toward salvation.¹²

Damnation, meanwhile, presupposes the absence of hope in and love for God, but also entails (1) the pain of *definitive* privation of the grace, knowledge, and vision of God; (2) *by a personal aversion to the will of God*.¹³ The latter point is most important. Damnation as a form of suffering *stems from* malice toward the divine will. It is brought on by a voluntary desire to privilege the egotistical desires of one's own will to the goodness and will of God in a definitive and all-encompassing way. The greatest "punishment" incurred by this disposition, therefore, is *self-inflicted*. It is the deprivation of the vision of God, *and knowledge that this self-inflicted loss is eternal*.¹⁴

Defined in these terms, it is evident that from a biblical perspective, one must say that there was neither despair nor the experience of damnation in the soul of Christ at Golgotha due to the fact that Christ is sinless.¹⁵ On the contrary, the perfect human obedience of the Son in his human acts is the eloquent testimony of a love for the will of the Father and is the necessary condition of possibility for human salvation.¹⁶ Yet this still leaves open the possibility that the non-biblical perspective of Reimarus

¹² In *In II Cor.*, cap. 4, lec. 3, Aquinas comments on 2 Cor 4:8 ("We are afflicted in every way . . . but not driven to despair") interpreting hope and despair as opposing responses to temporal misfortune: "*But we are not abandoned by God. . . .* Persons who are without hope and [therefore] without the help of God . . . are left destitute. Yet those who trust and hope in God alone, however much they lack, are not abandoned" [my translation; emphasis added].

¹³ *ST II-II*, q. 34, a. 1: "God may be the object of hatred for some, in so far as they look upon Him as forbidding sin, and inflicting punishment"; *ST II-II*, q. 34, a. 2, s.c.: "But hatred of God is contrary to the love of God, wherein man's best consists"; and *ST II-II*, q. 34, a. 2, c.: "The defect in sin consists in its aversion from God, and this aversion would not have the character of guilt, were it not voluntary. . . . Now this voluntary aversion from God is directly implied in the hatred of God."

¹⁴ Aquinas teaches these ideas in *ST I*, q. 63, a. 1; q. 64, aa. 2 and 3, c. and ad 3. In *ST I-II*, q. 87, a. 4, he notes that the "infinite" punishment of sin is the self-inflicted "pain of loss" of the vision of God, whereas the punishments inflicted by God as a result of sin are finite.

¹⁵ On the sinlessness of Christ, see 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:21–22; 1 Jn 3:5. There is no indication that Mark thought differently from the rest of the early Christian community on this matter.

¹⁶ This perspective is already found in the pre-New Testament Christology of Phil 2:8–9. Presumably an analogous doctrine is expressed by Mk 10:45 and 14:36. See the argument to this effect by Ben Witherington III, *The Many Faces of the Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 78–90, 128–38.

is essentially correct, and that the historical Jesus of Nazareth in fact died in an act of disillusioned despair. Could it be said, for example, that the cry of Mark 15:34 denotes a bewildered accusation rendered against God due to a conviction about the absence of divine intervention?¹⁷

In response to this suggestion, two ideas must be kept in mind. First of all, it is impossible to prove by historical reason alone what Christ said on the cross prior to the New Testament presentation of this event. However, if we employ the “criterion of dissimilarity” it seems probable that Mark has transmitted an accurate historical memory.¹⁸ As Douglas Hare points out, in Mark’s narrative the cry is misunderstood by onlookers due to a linguistic resemblance in the Aramaic language. They interpret it as a call to Elijah. Both the linguistic and theological interpretations of the cry given by its hearers make no sense from within an early Christian (Greek-speaking) theological perspective. Furthermore, the statement “why have you forsaken me” clearly raised theological difficulties for some members of the earliest Christian community, as denoted by Luke’s purposeful omission of it from his Gospel. Therefore one can reasonably posit the cry as a pre-New Testament event correctly reported by a community that did not fully understand it.¹⁹

Second, however, the death cry of Mark 15:34 is also a citation of Psalm 22:2. As Justin Martyr first noted, therefore, it suggests on Christ’s part the *purposeful* invocation of a psalm, denoting an act of prayer and

¹⁷ Close to Reimarus is the theological position of Luz (ibid., 554) who claims that the disillusionment of Jesus on the cross in fact denotes a rupture, or suffering, in the life of God himself. “Jesus is depicted [in Mt 27:46–50] in the colors of a biblical righteous man who suffers, who struggles with his God, and who even accuses Him. In this sense, the two-natures doctrine [of Chalcedon], to the degree that in its classical orthodox form it tended to assume for Jesus a divine self incapable of suffering, is a poor guide for interpreting this text.”

¹⁸ As interpreted by Ernst Käsemann and others, the “criterion of dissimilarity” can be employed as a principle for discerning the likelihood that a saying in the Gospel should be attributed to Christ when it helps one discern a simultaneous dissimilarity between a saying attributed to Christ and (1) aspects of the Judaism of the time of Jesus as well as (2) the later ideas of the early Church. However, for N. T. Wright, the principle should also invoke the theory of a “double similarity”—between the sayings of Christ and the Judaism of first-century Palestine, as well as between the words of the historical Jesus and the teachings of the early Church. In this sense, the principle points toward both the Judaic origins of Christ’s teaching as well as its originality in the context of Second Temple Judaism. It also points toward the way this teaching is the origin of (but not strictly identical with) the teaching of the later Christian movement. For this interpretation of the principle, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 131–33.

¹⁹ See Douglas Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 322.

implying a claim to prophetic fulfillment.²⁰ This line of thinking raises the question of whether the invocation of the psalm by the historical Jesus implied that he was expressing a messianic hope even during his crucifixion. Indeed, the Psalter was classically associated with the prophecies of David. In this case, the hope of vindication by God (such as that which occurs at the end of the psalm) could well be intended even in citing its opening line.²¹ What is certain is that the references to the psalms present in Christ's last words in all four Gospels were interpreted in messianic fashion in the earliest Church. The entire early Christian community seems to have believed that Christ in fact died in prayer and that his citation of the psalms had prophetic overtones.²² If this is the case, however, it becomes absurd to presume the existence of an experience of radical disillusionment, despair, or accusation underlying Christ's last words. On the contrary, the early Christian interpretation of Christ's last words may simply be the best historical understanding of what Jesus intended them to signify.²³ Therefore, even from the perspective of

²⁰ Justin Martyr, *Dial. Tryp.* c. 97–99. This exegesis was to become widespread in the ancient Church. See for example, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 19, 2; IV, 20, 8; IV, 33, 12; V, 7, 1; Athanasius, *Contra Arian.*, II, 66; IV, 28; Jerome, *In Matt.* IV, on 27:46; Hilary, *De Trin.*, XI, 15.

²¹ For extensive argumentation concerning the messianic significance of Ps 22 in the New Testament, see Gregory Vall, "Psalm 22: *Vox Christi* or Israelite Temple Liturgy?" *The Thomist* 66 (2002): 175–200. On the question of the "messianic" use of the psalm at Qumran and in early rabbinic literature, see Gilles Dorival, "L'Interpretation Ancienne du Psaume 21 (TM 22)," in *David, Jésus et la Reine Esther*, ed. G. Dorival (Paris-Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 225–314. N. T. Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 600–1) situates the citation of Ps 22 by Jesus within the larger context of his prophetic appropriation of the Davidic Psalter, and his messianic intention to "act out" the drama of Israel so as to initiate through the events of his life the eschatological coming of God's kingdom. In this sense, Wright speculates that Jesus' citation of the first line of the psalm may well have indicated a messianic interpretation of the "victory" of the afflicted one discussed at the end of the psalm (v. 22ff.).

²² In Mt 27:46, Jesus appeals to the same verse. In Lk 23:46, he cites Ps 31:5 (c.f. Acts 7:59 and 1 Pet 4:19). Jn 19:28 ("I thirst") seems to refer to Ps 69:21, although some scholars point to a possible parallel with Ps 22: 15. All of these uses imply messianic claims by the New Testament authors: Christ's death fulfilled prophecy. On the development of this exegesis in the earliest post-New Testament Christian writers, see the study of Jean Danielou, *Études d'exégèse judéo-chrétienne (les Testimonia)* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1966), 28–41.

²³ This is essentially the "apologetical" argumentation of R. Brown in his *The Death of the Messiah*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 1085–88. While he is sympathetic to the claim that Mk 15:34 represents an authentic historical memory, he notes that it is also recounted within an entirely theological context (1044–48). To claim as Reimarus did, that the cry necessarily denotes a historical event of

“historical reason alone,” the interpretation of biblical faith remains an open possibility. Yet, theologically speaking, if it *need not* be seen as an act of abandoning God through hopelessness, Christ’s cry to God *must* be considered as a cry of hope to God for deliverance. More precisely, it is a cry of desire.

Christ’s Love and Our Alienation

These statements do not exclude the above-mentioned theological hypothesis: that Christ experienced something analogous to damnation and despair in the sufferings and agony he underwent in the passion, and that he did so due to his identification with our state of alienation from God out of love for us. There is no doubt that the biblical teaching of St. Paul on Christ’s passion suggests some kind of theology of a “reversal of roles” in which Christ takes upon himself effects of our sinfulness precisely in order to liberate us from them.²⁴ But two unavoidable qualifications need to be kept in mind in this regard. The first is that (as all Christian theologians agree) Christ did this by love for us and out of loving obedience to God the Father.²⁵ Therefore, theologically speaking, the spiritual agony he underwent was an *effect* of his love for human beings, an agony he endured precisely to manifest more radically that love. It in no way stemmed, then, *from the same root cause* as the spiritual sufferings of the despairing and the damned (these causes being the refusal of the demands of divine love and the aversion to God’s will).

Second, as I have noted above, the pains of damnation are *principally* the regret of the loss of God through *one’s own refusal* of divine life. They come from within the personal agent due to aversion for God. Therefore, there is a radical difference of causality in acts stemming from love versus those associated with the refusal of love. Because of this radical difference of causalities, the two states that derive from them can rightfully be said to be essentially dissimilar. If this is the case, then they cannot be compared “analogically” and the attribution of a “state of damnation” to the sufferings of Christ implies a pure equivocation. True, the respective *effects* of

despair that Christian theology cannot account for is absurd, since Mark shows us in a following verse (v. 39) that precisely the way in which Christ died was (according to Mark) the cause for the recognition by the gentile centurion that he was the Son of God. Brown speculates that the historical Christ probably died with *both* a hope expressed through prayer *as well as the feeling* of forsakenness which he offered to God (1048–51), and that this was accurately reported by the early Christian community.

²⁴ See esp. 2 Cor 5:14–15, 21.

²⁵ See the emphasis on this idea by Calvin in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. II, ch. 16, no. 12.

sin and love in the two cases under consideration may resemble each other. However, it only follows from this that the two states may be predicated of one another in a *merely* metaphorical fashion, and need not entail any kind of real analogy.

To clarify this perspective, one may consider that for Aquinas metaphorical expressions ("he is as dumb as an ox") depend on a similitude of effects derived from two realities that share no common "ratio" or common essence and are in no way the cause of one another.²⁶ By contrast, strictly analogical predication requires something that is essentially common to the two terms that are compared. To take an example from Aristotelian ontology, diverse facets of reality are said to "be" in diverse ways—as substances, qualities, quantities, and so on. Despite their real differences, all of these categorical modes of being can be said to "be" in some common sense. This analogical attribution of "being" must be contrasted, however, with the "attribution" of damnation to the terms we are considering. The reason for this is that the absence of love for God and the presence of love are not diverse modes of participation in a wider spectrum of analogical modes of existence or goodness. On the contrary, sin is the absence of goodness in the appetitive will. It entails a voluntary privation of love. Therefore, sin is also the negative contrary of love, which it necessarily excludes. If we employ the so-called "analogy of proper proportionality" (A is to C1 as B is to C2), which Thomists characteristically apply to creatures to compare them, goodness can be said to reside analogically (as C1 and C2) in both the qualities (A) and the quantity (B) of a human person because they have "existence" in common and all existence is good. It does not reside analogically in both the love for God and the refusal to love God, because one is the privation of the other.²⁷ True, Christ's passion is *like* an experience of damnation or despair in certain respects because the agony he undergoes bears certain resemblances to the agony of the despairing. He can be said to suffer the pains of deprivation of the psychologically felt presence of God in a way that is *metaphorically* similar to that of the damned (through the absence of *effects* of joy, consolation, etc.). Yet this similarity contains *nothing* that is *essentially* the same as the latter state because Christ's suffering does not

²⁶ On metaphorical as opposed to properly analogical predication, see *ST* I, q. 13, a. 6. I am using "essence" here broadly to denote what Thomists mean by the "ratio entis," the "intelligibility" common to diverse members of an analogically united "set."

²⁷ On the analogy of proportionality and the use of metaphorical similitudes, especially as applied to Christ, see M. T.-L. Penido, *Le rôle d'analogie en théologie dogmatique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1931), 42–46, 397–404.

stem from an absence of or resistance to divine love. These latter faults, by contrast, contribute to the *essence* of despair and damnation.

Calvin suggests that the “pains of hell” experienced by Christ consist *principally* in his dread, sorrow, and fear of being forsaken by God as well as his experience of the wrath of God against human sin. Here what defines the state at essence is the judgment and wrath of God.²⁸ I am suggesting, by contrast, that the pains of damnation stem, instead, from the voluntary refusal to embrace God’s loving will, and the deprivation of the vision of God that results. The pain comes first and foremost from the subject *who is averse to God and himself forsakes God*, and only secondarily from God’s punishment, which follows as a consequence.²⁹ The *essence* of Christ’s agony, therefore, stems from something entirely different from such aversion to God (divine love) and therefore, strictly speaking, is not analogous to the state of the damned. In fact, at heart it is entirely dis-analogous.

Christ’s Suffering Hope

In conclusion, it can be said that Christ in his crucifixion must be said to have experienced terrible agony, both spiritual and physical. Yet, he did not despair of the promises of God or experience the “separation” from

²⁸ On Mt 27:46, Calvin writes: “There is *nothing more dreadful* than to feel God as Judge, *whose wrath is worse than all deaths.*” *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 3, ed. David Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 207 [emphasis added].

²⁹ For John Damascene and for Aquinas, God “antecedently” wills to save each person, but he permits the refusal of his grace and *consequently* sentences a person who perseveres in sin by his justice. (See *De Fide Orth.*, II, c. 29, as cited by Aquinas in *ST I*, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1.) Calvin explicitly refuses the theological validity of the distinction between the antecedent and consequent will of God (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. III, ch. 23, no. 8). Consequently, damnation for him stems primarily from a positive will of God, rather than a divine permission. It follows logically that Christ’s experience of damnation stems also from the positive will of God, which substitutes Christ as a subject of wrath for us, in order that we might be justified (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. II, ch. 16, nos. 5 and 10). Calvin does stipulate that this “substitution” occurs in and through the Father’s love for us, and not as a condition for the latter (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. II, ch. 16, nos. 3–4). Aquinas, meanwhile, holds that Christ did subject himself to our fallen state for our sake and, in this sense, took our punishments upon himself for our redemption. But he also notes that it is impossible for an innocent man to submit to a penal substitution for the guilt due to another, as if he were to assume the sins of the other (*ST I–II*, q. 87, aa. 7–8). Instead, Christ “substitutes” his obedience for our disobedience so as to repair in our human nature the injustice done to God’s loving wisdom by human sin. For a helpful Thomistic critique of Calvin’s penal substitution theory, see Philippe de La Trinité, *What is Redemption?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961).

God that is characteristic of the damned. Despair or separation is impossible because a plenitude of love and obedience informs all of the human actions of Christ and is incompatible with human sin. Yet, if we exclude such despair and separation as causes, then how might we explain his cry of want, denoted by Mark 15:34?

It must be borne in mind that this cry denotes not only love but also privation. The state of Christ on the cross is a "mixed" state, simultaneously implying both expectation and suffering, presence and absence. What I would propose is that Aquinas's understanding of the theological virtue of hope in the heart of Christ helps us take account precisely of such a mixed state. The latter "theological virtue," according to Aquinas, is both a source of expectation (and therefore desire implying non-possession) as well as of dissatisfaction.³⁰ It is an expression of the "tension" of a personal love seeking a good as yet possessed only imperfectly. In Christ, a deeper knowledge of his own final end, as well as that of those he came to save, would certainly have meant that such a love existed in an especially radical way. Could it also have meant that he experienced a deeper desire and dissatisfaction than others, precisely because of this same love? For Aquinas, loving hope in the heart of Christ was a source of intense desire that could no doubt have co-existed with torment and even profound spiritual and emotional sadness. Aquinas claims that during his passion Christ hoped both for his own glorification by the Father and for the salvation of all human beings.³¹ Yet, hope is a complex virtue, according to Aquinas, precisely because within it expectation/desire can and do co-exist with the non-possession of that which is hoped for. This means that in hope, desire and sadness, deprivation, and agony can and often do co-exist.³² Pushing the question one step further we can ask if this desire *was itself* the "cause" of an increased suffering and agony? If so, then this inner tension of desire (as both hope and suffering) is a possible explanation for the inner meaning of the death cry of the crucified Christ. To explore this possibility further, I will now turn to a comparison of the thinking of Mark and John on this subject.

II.

In the second part of this essay I would like to briefly note three parallels that exist between the theology of Christ's crucifixion in Mark as it

³⁰ ST II-II, q. 17, a. 1: "The object of hope is a future good, difficult but possible to obtain."

³¹ ST III, q. 21, a. 3, c., ad 2 and 3. See also III, q. 7, a. 4.

³² In ST III, q. 46, aa. 7 and 8, Aquinas insists on this fact. This is a point I will return to below.

relates to that of John. In particular I will be concerned to compare Mark 15:34 with John 19:28 as they exist within the larger context of the two respective theological visions of the Evangelists. My central claim will be this: Despite (and not withstanding) the reality of the differences in perspective between the two Gospel writers, the death cry that precedes the “offering of vinegar” in either narration is a cry contextualized by both desire and agony, which has immediate eschatological overtones.

Christ's Expectation of Exaltation

In both Mark and John, the death cry of Christ is contextualized by desire. We are given to understand by a previously stated expectation that the death of Christ will be redemptive and will be the occasion for the “exaltation” of the Son of Man. In John’s Gospel this theme is evident: The narrative informs us from the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus that his death is an event foreseen and willed by God for our salvation. It is precisely because the suffering of Christ in love is the chosen means for our salvation that this event is itself the “exaltation” of the Son of Man.³³ This perspective is a “precondition,” then, for the right interpretation of the cross as a saving event. Consequently, the final words of Christ (“I thirst”; “It is accomplished”) must be understood in light of his earlier foretelling of his suffering and death on behalf of all.³⁴ For John these words manifest something of the profound peace that underlies the act of self-offering that characterizes the soul of Christ in his passion.

Of course, at first this may seem simply at odds with the “cry of dereliction” according to Mark. In fact, as scholars commonly note, there are some signs that John wished precisely to counteract the impression that Jesus was somehow “abandoned” by God in his experience of death.³⁵ Yet

³³ Cf. Jn 3:14: “So must the Son of Man must be *lifted up*”; Jn 8:28: “When you *lift up* the Son of Man then you will know that I am”; Jn 12:32: “When I am *lifted up* from the earth, then I will draw all men to myself.” As C. H. Dodd, Brown, Schnackenburg, C. K. Barrett, and others have shown, the author of the fourth Gospel systematically transfers the characteristics and functions assigned by the Synoptic authors to the glorified Son of Man from the exalted state of the resurrection to the crucifixion event itself. See in particular, C. H. Dodd, *The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 432–43.

³⁴ A point made by R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 283.

³⁵ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1073. In Mk 14:35 Jesus asks the Father that “if it be possible, this hour might pass from him.” As if to contradict the impression that Jesus is abandoned, Jn 12:27–28 has Jesus stating: “And what should I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose have I come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” In contrast to Mk 15:34, Brown notes that in Jn 16:32 we read: “I am not alone, for the Father is with me.”

if we place the cry of Mark 15:34 in its broader narrative context, we may note two important facts that moderate this sense of discontinuity. First, it is evident that the cry in Mark comes after a theological narrative in which there are three prophetic announcements of the crucifixion *and* resurrection of the Son of Man.³⁶ This means that the *expectation* of both the crucifixion as a mode of dying and a subsequent exaltation by God through resurrection must be seen as central theological motifs that structure the Markan narrative. This same theological expectation of both death and subsequent vindication seems to be borne out in the words of Jesus before the high priest in Mark 14:62, just prior to the crucifixion, where he explicitly foretells of his exaltation as “the Son of Man.”³⁷ Second, as Schnackenburg has noted, many of the “Son of Man” sayings in Mark denote the reality of an eschatological figure *already* rendered present in Jesus’ ministry (in ways analogous to the perspective of John). Consequently, this presence must be presumed as present and active *on the cross*.³⁸

If we keep these two ideas in mind, then we must see the “death cry” of Mark’s Gospel as a “moment” theologically contextualized by the reader’s expectation of the cross, foreseen and embraced by Jesus “as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45, cf. 14:24), and in view of his exaltation “to the right hand of Power” (Mk 14:62). The Gospel taken on its own, then, *as a theological interpretation of the life of Christ*, should be seen as positing an *expectant* (if agonizing) prayer present within the cry of Christ on the cross. The Jesus of Mark knew he was suffering for us and had in view his own exaltation by the Father. Whether or not the cry of Christ in Mark should be seen to denote not only agony, but also “dereliction” (that is to say, an inner experience of abandonment) can therefore be disputed. M. J. Lagrange argues that Jesus’ citation of Psalm 22:2 in Mark 15:34 must be interpreted in light of contemporary Jewish tradition. Understood in this way, Mark the theologian sees it referring to the rest of the psalm and thus looks forward to the triumph of the subject in verse 25. In this case the citation of it by Christ is meant to denote an expectation of vindication by God.³⁹ In any case,

³⁶ Mk 8:31: “The Son of Man must suffer many things . . . and be killed, and after three days rise again.” See likewise, Mk 9:31; 10:33f.

³⁷ On this eschatological narrative in Mark, especially as it underlies the use of Ps 22, see Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 177–82.

³⁸ See R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 1, 535–38, on Mk 1:7, 2:10, 2:28, 8:38, 10:37, 14:62.

³⁹ M. J. Lagrange, *L’Evangile Selon Saint Marc* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1921), 433–34. For complementary reflections, see George Beasley-Murray, *John* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1989), 350–52. If one were to consider Christ subject to despair *from*

what is certain is that it is seen by Mark as the expression of a desire that is immediately efficacious. Shortly after his cry of Psalm 22:2, and a final wordless exclamation (Mk 15:37), Christ dies and the eschatological world of God begins to become manifest. This is a point I will return to below.

The Reality of Christ's Suffering

The second parallel concerns the dimension of agony that surrounds the death of Christ in both Gospels. In the Gospel of John, this is to be seen particularly in the cry of thirst that precedes the offer of the sponge with vinegar and, therefore, "takes the place" of what would be the cry of agony in Mark. I have noted above that it communicates a sense of the desire of Christ in a solemn way, in view of a portrait of the suffering Christ as sovereignly free and victorious in love. Certainly this observation is consistent with the work of modern exegesis, which has drawn attention to the eschatological character of Christ's work already effectively "realized" at the cross.

At the same time, the narrative structure of John conveys to us not only that Christ can suffer sadness and emotional distress, but also that he has begun to experience an inner agony precisely because of his "hour."⁴⁰

Mark's perspective, this would contrast notably with the portrayal of the "hope of the martyrs" found in texts such as 2 Mac 6 and 7, where faithful Jews are seen to have died under persecution with firm confidence in God's resurrection of the just from the dead. The ideal expressed in such texts indicates an eschatological view common to many Jews of Jesus' time, which finds numerous echoes in Mark's Gospel (6:14–16, 9:9f., 10:29–31, 12:18–27, 14:58). Are we to attribute, then, to the dying Christ of Mark's Gospel a less resolute hope in the resurrection than to these others whose hopes characterized the Jewish beliefs of that period? . . . especially when Mark portrays Jesus as sharing in such beliefs? See on this topic N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 150–53, 401–29.

⁴⁰ John's Christology emphasizes at various points the real human fatigue, sadness, and suffering of Jesus (Jn 4:6, 11:35–38). Jn 12:27 clearly denotes the actual presence of agony in the soul of Christ: "Now is my soul troubled. . . ." Yet Jesus lives out this agony freely, with the recognition that "for this purpose [he] has come to this hour." John makes it clear, then, that Christ both suffers and that his suffering does not cause him to forfeit the prerogatives of the wisdom of God present in his person. Contrast this with the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, in which Christ is said on the one hand to be "as having no pain" during his crucifixion (4:10), but simultaneously cries out in 5:19—"My power, O power, you have forsaken me." The former text seems to confuse the humanity and divinity of Christ, whereas the latter separates them. Brown (*The Death of the Messiah*, 1337–38) does not think the text is docetic. But one can rightfully say that the interplay of Christ's humanity and his divinity is distorted in this text, whereas John's Gospel holds them in perfect accord.

Something is radically "incomplete" in the experience of Christ leading up to the passion. As Beasley-Murray has noted, Jesus' citation of Psalm 69:21 in John 19:28: "for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" is seen by John as the "fulfillment of Scripture." But it is simultaneously a reference to a psalm that in its broader context denotes both suffering and inner desolation: "This saying is part of the lengthy description of the desolation, isolation, and scorn experienced by the Righteous Sufferer, and in the psalm the giving of the drink appears to be part of the torment inflicted upon the sufferer."⁴¹

This fact can be coupled with the observation that throughout the Gospel we are given successive indications that Christian redemption more generally is "not yet fully complete" even after the occurrence of the Paschal mystery. Although Christ is the presence of eternal life already made manifest (Jn 11:25), the effect of that presence is not yet fully realized (Jn 5:28–29).⁴² Given these elements in the background theological context, what difference does this make for our interpretation of the cry of thirst? The particular point we should make here is that John 19:28 is illustrative of a self-conscious tension that exists in John's theology between what is actually being accomplished on the cross and what is as yet desired. In a sense it is the most paradoxical manifestation of this tension: By it we are told that Christ "fulfills" Scripture, thus accomplishing everything. At the same time, this fulfillment itself is expressed *as a thirst*, an incomplete desire, and one that, as we have seen, clearly includes dimensions of agony.

Given this context of suffering, what does Christ's "thirst" of unfulfillment cry out for? Some commentators detect a note of Johannine irony reflected by the cry.⁴³ Christ is "thirsting" for our human salvation

⁴¹ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 351. He goes on to add: "One may no more assume that John's emphasis on the cross as the exaltation of Jesus excludes his desolation of spirit than his emphasis on the deity of the Son excludes the Son's true humanity. That Jesus hung on the cross as King was not in spite of his agony, epitomized in the thirst of crucifixion, but through his agony endured in obedience and love to the glory of God."

⁴² C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 67–69, notes that, on the one hand according to John, the eschaton is present already in the apostolic life of Jesus (Jn 4:23, 5:25), and the Church lives in quasi-eschatological terms (cf. Jn 14:23 on *parousia*). Yet, on the other hand, other statements (Jn 5:29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54) clearly refer to the last day, the final judgment and the general resurrection that have yet to be realized. It cannot be claimed, then, that the Gospel of John departs essentially from the broader eschatological viewpoint that is common to the New Testament writings.

⁴³ See in particular Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants Press, 1957), 582; R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 318;

(Jn 4:7–9), even while it is he himself (we have already been told) who gives the “living water” and it is we who “had [we] known, should have asked him to drink” (Jn 4:10). In fact, “from his heart will flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:38), from which believers may live. However, this living water will only come forth *once the Spirit is given*, that is to say, *once Christ is glorified* (Jn 7:39). If this reading is correct, then the “thirst” of Christ, placed in a broader Johannine context, denotes his desire for the sending of the Holy Spirit, the “Paraclete,” who can only be given once Jesus has “gone to the Father” (Jn 14:2, 16:7, 17:11). This result is in fact obtained in John 20:22 where the risen Christ communicates the Holy Spirit to his disciples on the evening of Easter. Consequently, the cry of thirst at the time it is uttered denotes a state of “as yet unachieved” suffering, even as it claims to be the “fulfillment” of the Hebrew Scriptures, that is, the condition of possibility for the sending of the Spirit.⁴⁴

What conclusion should be derived from these observations? My claim at this point is that both John and Mark presuppose a soteriological expectation or desire that informs the suffering of Christ in his crucifixion. Both of them see this desire as tending toward a later, postresurrection state of fulfillment, and both of them see this desire as accompanied (to a greater and lesser degree, respectively) by agony and suffering. In other words, both of them attribute to Christ characteristics of what we have denoted as “theological hope”: the expectation of salvation from God and the actual non-possession of that salvation (accompanied by actual suffering). In my final point in this section I would like to insist on the equally *eschatological* dimension of the death cry of Christ in both Gospels.

and more recently, Gail O'Day, *John Commentary*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible IX* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 832–33.

⁴⁴ In contrast to Lindars and Lightfoot, Brown (*The Death of the Messiah*, 1074) thinks that the “I thirst” of Jn 19:28 refers directly to the words of Jesus in 18:11: “Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?” This “thirst,” therefore, refers to the cup of suffering that Christ wishes to drink in order to accomplish the Father’s will (cf. Jn 4:34, 5:36, 17:4). Such an interpretation must still affirm that Jesus “thirsts” to accomplish the Father’s will and bears the suffering of the cross in order to eventually give the Spirit to humanity. See on this point, Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 504–5. In the end, however, the discernment is literary. It seems to me that the symbols of water, thirst, and rebirth in the Spirit are too important in the main body of the text to be entirely separated from the reference to thirst in Jn 19:28. This is all the more clear when we consider the symbolic paradox that water (which we know is associated with life in the Spirit) flows forth from Christ’s side almost immediately after his cry.

The Final Redemption of the World

My final claim is that for both authors, the theological results of the cry of Christ are eschatological. Yet, for both Mark and John, respectively, how did the suffering and agonizing exclamation of Christ effectuate a change in the soteriological order of reality?

John's Gospel offers us a clear answer in the shape of the aforementioned "realized eschatology" of the sending of the Spirit. The activity of the post-Paschal Spirit of Christ is articulated clearly in John 16:8 in overtly eschatological terms. Because Christ has died, the Holy Spirit can now demonstrate to the world God's eschatological judgment.⁴⁵ As Yves Congar has noted, there are multiple parallels in Johannine thought between Christ and the Spirit in their promised roles of mediating judgment from God *now* (prior to the final resurrection).⁴⁶ Consequently, we can say that the thirst of Christ (his suffering and agony) lived out in expectation of the sending of the Spirit *has for its immediate effect* the offer of eschatological (eternal) life for us in the present in the Spirit. This offer is seemingly already manifest in the blood and water poured out at the cross, which foreshadow the "new birth" of baptism in the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 19:34 in relation to 3:5). By the Spirit we enter into an eschatological continuum with the event of the Paschal mystery itself.⁴⁷ The cry of thirst finds its *response*, therefore, in our acceptance of the living water: the Spirit and the saving *agape* of Christ. By remaining in the latter (Jn 15:4), we receive the capacity Jesus offers in the Paraclete to accomplish the Father's will (Jn 15:10, 26) and therefore to grow in the vocation of filial adoption (Jn 1:12–13).

Is Mark's death cry equally "eschatological," even if in a somewhat dissimilar way? We must answer affirmatively if we consider the key evidence of the biblical symbolism of the cry itself. As Raymond Brown has noted, an important motif in the New Testament sees "the cry" generally as a symbol of the initiation of the eschaton.

⁴⁵ See Jn 16:8–15.

⁴⁶ Y. Congar, *Je Crois en l'Esprit Saint*, vol. 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1979), 82–86. For example, both Jesus and the Spirit are given by the Father (Jn 3:16, 14:16) and will remain with the disciples from now on (Jn 14:20; 14:16, 26). Both will be known to the them alone (Jn 14:19, 14:17), and will lead them into the fullness of truth (Jn 1:17, 18:37, 16:13).

⁴⁷ As C. K. Barrett notes (*The Gospel According to St. John*, 90): "The Spirit places the world in the position it will occupy at the last judgment. . . . The Spirit's work is to bear witness (Jn 15:26) to Christ, to make operative what Christ had already effected. The Spirit is thus the eschatological *continuum* in which the work of Christ, initiated in his ministry and awaiting its termination at his return, is wrought out."

In John 5:28 the cry of the Son of Man causes all those who are in the tombs to hear; and in 11:43 the *clamor* and *loud cry* of Jesus help to call forth Lazarus from the tomb. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the cry of the archangel accompanies the coming of the Lord to raise the dead, while in 4 Ezra 13:12–13 the Man from the Sea *calls* the multitude to him. In judgment the Lord *speaks, roars, and cries out*, at times producing earthquakes, in Amos 1:2; Joel 4:16 (3:16); Jeremiah 25:30; and Psalm 46:7, even as in Revelation 10:3 the angel *shouts* with a loud voice as he reveals the seven thunders.⁴⁸

In the Gospel of Matthew the cry of agony from the cross (Mt 27:46) is immediately accompanied by such eschatological signs: The sun darkens, the temple rock is split open and its curtain is torn, the earth trembles, the dead are raised, and the gentiles begin to recognize Christ (Mt 27:45, 51–54). In Mark's Gospel, the eschatological effects are more discrete but are still present. Darkness covers the earth, the temple veil is rent, and (most importantly) the centurion is converted to a recognition of Jesus as "the Son of God" (Mk 15:33, 38–39). As Schnackenburg has noted, this last event shows us that the death of Christ (and particularly his cry of agony) is seen by Mark as the first occasion for a fully lucent recognition of who Christ has been all along (Mk 1:1, 11, 24; 4:41; 9:7–8; 10:45), the Son of God who came to serve and to offer his life for our sake:

If we look over the picture of Jesus emerging [in Mark's Gospel] from the predication as the Son of God, we see majestic traits, namely, in the overcoming of Satan and in the power over demons, but also other assertions that reflect his path of suffering and death. He is the servant of God who obediently goes his way as the beloved Son of God. He is the Son of God who becomes apparent in death and who in the deepest distress of his humanity reveals his hidden majesty and divinity. The prayer of godforsakenness turns into the certainty that he is accepted by God. The dominant impression of the Son of God conveyed by the Gospel of Mark is the nearness of Jesus to God, which is not suspended even in death.⁴⁹

Consequently, the narrative leaves us to conclude that the immediate result of Christ's death in agony, and his abandonment to the Father, is the redemption of the world. A new era has begun in which Christ's "kingdom" is made available to those who believe in his mysterious identity and soteriological action.

⁴⁸ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1045.

⁴⁹ See R. Schnackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels, A Biblical Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 50–51.

III.

I have argued above that the cry of Christ from the cross should be interpreted theologically as a prayer of desire related to his hope to introduce humanity into the eschatological gift of redemption. Hope implies an incomplete state in which both loving desire and painful deprivation can be simultaneously present. In examining the last words of Christ according to John and Mark, I have claimed that the cry from the cross is presented by each as a desire-in-agony (with more emphasis on agony in Mark and more on desire in John). Therefore, both the Gospel writers affirm the existence of such a "mixed state" in the soul of Christ during his crucifixion. Furthermore, this cry has explicitly eschatological overtones for both, since it is seen to usher in a new age of redemption that begins at Golgotha.

In the final section of this paper, I would like to reflect theologically upon the relation of this desire-in-agony in Christ to the Thomistic affirmation of the beatific vision in the "heights" of Christ's soul. Are the two compatible? Might they even be complementary? I will seek to answer this question in three parts. First, I will discuss Aquinas's theory of how the immediate vision of God and intense agony could co-exist in the soul of Christ during his passion. Second, I will note what I think are three dimensions of this agony. Third, I will examine the effects of the vision on both Christ's desire and his agony for each of these dimensions. I will claim that for two of these, the vision would intensify the desire of Christ and mitigate but not alleviate his suffering. For the third, however, it would intensify both his desire and his agony simultaneously. It is this last form of agony above all that should be seen to characterize the suffering expressed by his death cry.

The Beatific Vision and Agony of Christ

Is the beatific vision in the heights of Christ's soul compatible with any form of agony in the soul of Christ during his crucifixion? After all, one might reasonably object that the bliss of the vision excludes any real capacity for suffering. To respond to this difficulty we must first note that according to Aquinas, the "economic mode" or "dispensation" of Christ's vision during his earthly life is understood to be very different from that of his vision in the exalted state of glory.⁵⁰ In the latter state, his body and

⁵⁰ On the economic mode of Christ's immediate knowledge of God in his earthly life, see *ST* III, q. 14, a. 1, ad 2; q. 15, a. 5, ad 3; q. 45, a. 2; q. 46, a. 8. This point has been studied by Jean-Pierre Torrell, "S. Thomas d'Aquin et la science du Christ," in *Saint Thomas au XXe siècle*, ed. S. Bonino (Paris: Éditions St. Paul, 1994), 394-409, esp. 400-401; and Edouard-Henri Weber, *Le Christ selon Saint Thomas*

emotional psychology participate each in their own way directly in the glory of his resurrected life. As a dimension of this glory, the joy and consolation of the spiritual presence of God in the “heights” of the soul of Christ “overflow” into the whole of his humanity. His “lower faculties” and in particular his psychological life participate intensively in the contemplative bliss of his spiritual soul.⁵¹

In the former state, however, this vision is not the source of any such experience. It does assure his soul of a continual knowledge of his own divine identity and will as the Son of God, but it *in no way* alleviates his “ordinary” states of human consciousness and sensation.⁵² This means that Christ, for Aquinas, can experience suffering in a typically human way in both its corporeal and psychological-spiritual dimensions. Consequently, the vision is entirely compatible with the intense human suffering that accompanies the kind of death that Jesus endured.

This having been said, Aquinas does not think the suffering of Christ and his knowledge of God simply co-exist on separate but unrelated “levels” of his soul. Rather, he distinguishes between the objects and subject of the various faculties of Christ’s soul, so as to make clear in what way the suffering and spiritual consolation of Christ occur simultaneously in the same human experience. On the one hand, he notes that the “faculties” of the human soul of Jesus experience irreducibly diverse objects during the crucifixion as either consolations or pains. So, just as Christ could suffer terrible pain in his physical body or sorrow in his sensible feelings (as the “objects” of his bodily sensation and inner emotional life, respectively), so he could also enjoy the immediate knowledge of God as the “object” of his intellectual activity.⁵³ The objects experienced remain entirely distinct. Yet the same and identical subject (the Son as man) is the one in whom these various experiences occur simultaneously, and in this way, Christ could suffer in the “entirety of his soul,” since the agony

D'Aquin (Paris: Desclée, 1988), 179–98. Torrell ultimately parts from Aquinas on the question of the beatific vision of the earthly Jesus, but he notes that Aquinas’s doctrine of the economic mode of the vision offers important responses to the aforementioned objections of Galot.

⁵¹ See on these ideas, *ST* III, q. 54, a. 2.

⁵² *ST* III, q. 14, a. 1, ad 2: “From the natural relationship which is between the soul and the body, glory flows into the body from the soul’s glory. Yet this natural relationship in Christ was subject to the will of his Godhead, and thereby it came to pass that the beatitude remained in the soul and did not flow into the body; but the flesh suffered what belongs to a passible nature.” *ST* III, q. 15, aa. 4–6, make clear that Aquinas understands “the body” or “the flesh” of Christ to include the passions and human psychology of the man Jesus.

⁵³ *ST* q. 46, aa. 7–8.

extends to all of his human nature. Likewise, he could experience the consolation of the Father's presence in the "entirety of his soul," since Jesus in his humanity was the subject of this consolation.⁵⁴ In this way, the happiness of being united in will with the Father could co-exist with extreme agony in Christ, such that the two experiences were objectively distinct but subjectively (and therefore experientially) inseparable. While one was a source of extreme trial and distress, the other could be a source of consolation and moral stability.⁵⁵ This contrast (without contradiction) in the life of Jesus would necessarily result in a complex spiritual experience: of confident expectation of deliverance on the one hand, and the presence of intense agony on the other. The inevitable result in the soul of Christ would be a unique form of intense soteriological desire, or what the Thomist tradition terms "theological hope."

Three Dimensions of Christ's Agony

Having clarified the above points, we can clearly distinguish (but not separate) three distinct dimensions of the agony of Christ. The first of these concerns his human nature as related to the form of his execution: public crucifixion. This is the physical and spiritual suffering of the human being who is betrayed, abandoned, judged unfairly, humiliated, rejected, beaten, and crucified. It would be common to any innocent person sentenced to such a death. Yet, as Aquinas points out, Jesus must also have felt physical and psychological pain with a greater acuity than other persons, due to the perfection of his human nature, the nobility of his soul, and the sensitivity of what we might call his cognitive psychology.⁵⁶ Indeed, because of the

⁵⁴ ST III, q. 46, a. 7: "It is evident that Christ's whole soul suffered. . . . Christ's 'higher reason' did not suffer thereby *on the part of its object*, which is God, who was the cause, not of grief, but rather of delight and joy, to the soul of Christ. Nevertheless, all the powers of Christ's soul did suffer according as any faculty is said to be affected *as regards its subject*, because all the faculties of Christ's soul were rooted in its *essence*, to which suffering extended while the body, whose act it is, suffered" [emphasis added].

⁵⁵ In ST III, q. 14, a. 1; q. 15, aa. 4–7 and q. 46, a. 6, ad 2 Aquinas argues that the sensible pain, sorrow, and fear of Christ were not *directly* affected by the vision, but only *indirectly* through the mediation of his reason. The vision stabilized the moral activity of Jesus, in and through his intense suffering, such that these passions were not permitted to overturn the rational desires of the mind of Christ. By a distant but real analogy, one could compare this to someone suffering in a hospital bed who is genuinely consoled by the presence and conversation of a friend.

⁵⁶ ST III, q. 46, a. 6: "The magnitude of his suffering may be considered from the susceptibility of the sufferer as to both soul and body. For his body was endowed with the most perfect constitution. . . . And consequently, Christ's sense of touch,

refinement of his sensibility and the purity of his moral innocence, Christ must have experienced such suffering in an especially poignant way.

Second, there is the mysterious agony more particular to Christ in his role as redeemer, which is a dimension of his “exchange” with a sinful humanity. This role entails an acceptance upon himself of some of the *consequences* of sin in our fallen humanity (including the fear of mortality, deep sadness, a loss of the sense of the consoling presence of God) without an experience of that sin itself.⁵⁷ While one may discuss this state in varying terms, I have insisted that, theologically speaking, it should not be equated with an experience of “separation from God” (the pain of damnation), nor be equated with an experience of the “wrath of God.”⁵⁸ Such experiences are despair-ridden and derive essentially from a refusal of God as one’s own final good. From the point of view of Pauline and Johannine theology, by contrast, it is necessary to affirm that Christ freely embraced some of the states of our fallen human nature precisely because of his more fundamental embrace of the Father’s will. He did this so as to infuse them with loving obedience on our behalf. In this way, he demonstrates to us a greater love for and unity with the Father than might be manifest otherwise.⁵⁹

Third, there is the agony of Christ that *results from* his love for us. This form of anguish stems above all from his extraordinary awareness of our

the sensitiveness of which is the reason for our feeling pain, was most acute. His soul, likewise, from its interior powers, apprehended most vehemently all the causes of sadness.”

⁵⁷ On this state of profound sadness that was permitted to occur in the soul of Christ despite the presence of the vision, see *ST* III, q. 46, aa. 3 and 6, c., and ad 2. Following Damascene (*De Fide Orth.*, bk. III, ch. 19), Aquinas insists that the divine will suspended some of the experiences of consolation in the soul of Christ which would normally be present even in the suffering of a virtuous man. The point of such unique suffering is to manifest more profoundly the gravity of human sin as well as the unique love of Christ for human beings.

⁵⁸ In discussing Paul’s claim that “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21), Aquinas (*In II Cor.* V, lec. 5, no. 201 [Marietti]) purposefully excludes any idea of a penal substitution (in which Christ would be himself representative of the sinner and suffer a vicarious punishment for guilt on our behalf). Instead, he refers this verse to Christ’s assumption out of love for us of a human nature capable of death and suffering (states that are consequences of sin). One sees consistent evidence of this exegetical tendency in his interpretations of Rom 3:25–6 (*In Rom.* III, lec. 3, nos. 310–312); Rom 8:3 (*In Rom.* VIII, lec. 1, no. 608); Gal. 3:13 (*In Gal.* III, lec. 5, nos. 148–49); Col 2:13–14 (*In Col.* II, lec. 3, no. 115); and Heb 2:17 (*In Heb.* II, lec. 4, no. 139).

⁵⁹ Aquinas makes these points in *ST* III, q. 46, aa. 1 and 4, commenting upon Jn 3:14 and Phil 2:8.

human sinfulness, distance from God, and refusal of God. The object of his suffering in this case is not found in himself, but in us.⁶⁰ Therefore, it depends upon and stems from Christ's possession of an extraordinary knowledge of the real spiritual state of human beings before God, and a corresponding desire to save them from eternal separation from God. This is the agony due to which Christ "loved [us] and gave his life for [us]" (Gal 2:20) throughout the duration of his passion, desiring to communicate a new life in God to human beings by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6, 5:25). Precisely in order to save human beings, Jesus is obliged to consciously confront and willingly vanquish the reality of their complicity with evil.⁶¹

The Inauguration of the Kingdom of God

We have established that there is a theoretical possibility of the simultaneous co-existence of profound illumination and great suffering in the soul of Christ during his passion. Furthermore, as I have already noted, Aquinas thinks the state of "vision" in the earthly Christ is compatible with the existence of "theological hope" within his soul. It is precisely because he "knows" of his mission as the Son, shared with the Father, that Jesus can intensely desire to see it accomplished, both in himself (psychologically and corporeally) and in his "members." Therefore, the question can be raised of *how* the extraordinary knowledge of Christ relates to the *desires* he has for the realization of redemption. More particularly, how does it relate to the desires he would have as regards each of the three above-mentioned sources of agony?

As regards the first dimension of agony (the natural experience of the terrible sufferings of Roman crucifixion), the Gospels tell us that Christ experienced a desire for deliverance *for himself*. In fact, it is reasonable to see this as an essential component of the cry/prayer of Mark 15:34/Psalm 22:2: "Why have you abandoned *me*?" Here the vision of God in the heights of Christ's soul as an object of knowledge would in no way alleviate the reality of his physical and spiritual agony, experienced violently

⁶⁰ ST III, q. 46, a. 6, c.: "The cause of the interior pain [of the passion] was, first of all, all the sins of the human race"; and ST III, q. 46, a. 6, ad 2: "In truth some sadness is praiseworthy . . . namely, when it flows from holy love, as, for instance, when a man is saddened over his own or other's sins. . . . And so to atone for the sins of all men, Christ accepted sadness, the greatest in absolute quantity, yet not exceeding the rule of reason."

⁶¹ It is here that I would locate the origins of extraordinary suffering such as that related by Lk 22:44 (the sweating of blood), and not in Christ's awareness of "the Father's wrath" and "the dread of hell," where Calvin places them. See *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. II, ch. 16, no. 12.

in both his body and psyche. Indeed, it may have intensified his desire for release from this state uniquely in and through an extreme abandonment to the Father's will. However, it would also simultaneously have mitigated the effects of this experience of suffering by permitting Christ in his human consciousness to know that he was accomplishing the Father's will, which he shared in as Son.⁶² It would have given him (in the heights of his soul) certain knowledge of his future exaltation as the Son of Man and a corresponding prayerful expectation, lived out in hope despite his terrible suffering, of this vindication received from the Father.⁶³ In this case, the suffering of Christ was mitigated by his certainty of the Father's will and his unshakable hope for final deliverance.

Similar comments can be made regarding the second dimension of Christ's agony: his mysterious experience of certain spiritual and moral consequences of our fallen state. Christ's crucifixion seen in this light may have entailed the *sentiment* of divine abandonment and a subjection to the deep sadness that results from the non-experience of God. His corresponding desire would then have been for the "eschatological presence" of God, fully experienced in both body and soul. If such a state is compatible with the beatific vision (as Aquinas's theology would, I think, allow), then two points must be made. On the one hand, in his earthly life Christ must have possessed the vision in such a way that his ordinary psychological consciousness could effectively function without felt consolations from his extraordinary knowledge of God. On the other hand, Christ's vision played an essential role in permitting him as man to adhere to the will of the Father at all times, precisely so as to save us despite his suffering.⁶⁴ Agony in Christ without transcendent wisdom and salvific obedience would be of little use to others. In this sense, we

⁶² The will of the Father is that same will that Christ as God the Son receives eternally from the Father in his divine nature. Jesus' human acceptance of the Father's will in the crucifixion need not entail an "alienation" from the divine will he shares in as God. On the contrary, it is the temporal, finite expression of this shared, divine love, expressed in and through his human acts. See on this point, White, "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ," 523–33.

⁶³ On the consoling effects of such knowledge during the passion of Christ, see *ST* III, q. 46, a. 8, c. and ad 1: The consolation occurs in Jesus as a human subject through the medium of his extraordinary knowledge, despite the ongoing reality of his pain and inhuman treatment.

⁶⁴ Perhaps interpreting Thomas Aquinas in his own way, John of the Cross, in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II, ch. 7, discusses the idea that throughout the passion Christ experienced "desolation" with respect to the internal and external senses, as well as intense spiritual aridity in the "lower part of his nature" (that is to say, his human psychology). Yet, simultaneously he gave his life for humanity in a knowing, affective union of will with the Father.

must again affirm that the vision of God in the soul of Christ increased his desire for deliverance but it also mitigated his anguish.

What about the third form of agony? Here (unlike in the previous two examples) we are not speaking of suffering in Christ stemming from sensible experience and objective knowledge of his own deprivations, but due to an extraordinary awareness of the spiritual ills of others. In this case, as Aquinas points out, knowledge can be a cause of suffering rather than a source of consolation.⁶⁵ By his vision, during the passion and crucifixion, Christ knew our human hearts better than we do; and in human actions he was able to perceive sin not only as a direct refusal of love, but also in all its subsequent consequences. This is to say that he saw our rejection of love as the initiative toward a permanent separation from God. In the words of Matthew Levering:

Christ's suffering has the intensity, then, of a "dark night," in which the horror of the *darkness* of sin is finally and perfectly exposed in Christ's soul by contrast to the glorious light of the divine Goodness, which Christ also knows. It is only by contrast to this light that "darkness" is intelligible. Christ bears interiorly the darkness in his anguish over the sins of each one of us, but it is crucial to note that he can only bear this darkness fully because of his simultaneous "light" by which he knows God.⁶⁶

The immediate vision in the soul of Christ, then, gave him a profound spiritual and psychological awareness of his confrontation with moral evil, and of his rejection by sinners. The conclusion I wish to draw here is that this knowledge necessarily *augmented* desire for our salvation *even as it simultaneously augmented his agony*. The two are inseparable, and both result from the presence in the soul of Christ of the beatific vision. In fact, in a certain sense we may even say that the desire for the salvation of human beings was itself the cause of suffering. At any rate, this unity of his vision and his agony together can be seen as an inevitable consequence of the intellectual grace he received for the sake of his mission as savior of the

⁶⁵ ST III, q. 46, a. 6, ad 4: "Christ grieved not only over the loss of his own bodily life, but also over the sins of all others. And this grief in Christ surpassed all grief of every contrite heart, both *because it flowed from a greater wisdom and charity, by which the pang of contrition is intensified, and because He grieved at the one time for all sins*, according to Isaiah 53:4: 'Surely He has borne our sorrows.' " This idea has been insightfully discussed by Charles Journet, *Les Septs Paroles du Christ au Croix* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1954), 88–90; and more recently by Matthew Lamb in "The Eschatology of St Thomas Aquinas," in *Aquinas on Doctrine*, ed. T. Weinandy, D. Keating, and J. Yocum (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 225–40; and Matthew Levering, *Sacrifice and Community* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 80–81.

⁶⁶ Levering, *Sacrifice and Community*, 80.

human race. *The real potential “despair” and “separation from God” that Christ perceived on Golgotha were not in himself but were in us.* These attributes of humanity as known in the clarity of his vision became, for him, the source of terrible agony.

Is it this agonizing, soteriological desire *on our behalf* that characterizes above all the cry of Christ from the cross? This would seem a likely interpretation for the “cry of thirst” of Christ in John 19:28, especially if we understand it as a plea for the gift of the Spirit. Christ “thirsts” for the salvation of all human persons and consequently implores the Father for the coming of the Paraclete (Jn 16:7–11). But could this kind of desire rightly be said to inform the cry of Mark 15:34? If we understand Christ’s “dereliction” as a confrontation with *our sin* by which he is humanly overwhelmed, and if we understand the eschatological importance of that cry in Mark’s gospel, then the answer is yes.⁶⁷ This cry is an exclamation of suffering due to the presence of evil, but it simultaneously marks an end to the reign of that evil. Through his cry of agony and desire, Jesus intends (through his consciousness of himself as the eschatological Son of Man) to inaugurate the kingdom of God (Mk 14:62). This being the case, we may speak (at least on one level) of Christ’s last words as an act of abandonment to God lived out in trust not only for himself individually, but also for us. Yet, we might also add that the eschaton can be said to begin by his own divine prerogative precisely with the final vocal cry that follows the cry of dereliction and immediately precedes his death (Mk 15:37; Mt 27:50). By this visceral but efficacious protest against the powers of sin, Jesus signals an accomplishment of the mission the Father has given him, and divinely initiates the end-times.

In light of these reflections, we might conclude that the beatific vision in the soul of Christ as Aquinas presents it is certainly compatible with a spiritual realism concerning the agony of Christ on the cross. This is particularly the case if we conceive of this agony as an expression of desire. Just as the Gospels of Mark and John can be seen to harmonize theologically in their respective forms of emphasis on agony and desire, so the account of Christ’s passion that we give theologically may do the same in terms of suffering and knowledge. Both poles of his experience must be respected

⁶⁷ A patristic parallel to this idea is found in Origen’s *Commen. Series In Matt.*, no. 135. There he understands Christ’s cry of agony in Mt 27:46 to be the result of his comprehension of human sin, simultaneously compared with his knowledge of the glory of the Father from which human beings had alienated themselves. Although he attributes faith to Christ, Vincent Taylor (*The Gospel According to St. Mark* [London: Macmillan, 1966], 594) offers similar views as to the origins of Christ’s sufferings.

in some integral fashion, no matter how much a particular account may wish to emphasize one aspect with respect to the other.

Conclusion

I have argued that the death cry of Christ is a cry of both desire and agony, and that this cry is compatible with the simultaneous presence in Christ's soul of both extraordinary knowledge and intense suffering. Fundamentally, the desire that informs this exclamation should be interpreted as a beseeching by Jesus of both his own deliverance/exaltation and our salvation in one inseparable act. In praying for these objects, Christ's words on the cross are eschatological in nature. His cry tends toward the final possession of a gift of redemption for humanity that is not yet fully possessed. Furthermore, the theological affirmation of such a "mixed state" of expectation and suffering in the soul of Christ is entirely compatible with (and in fact complementary to) the teaching of St. Thomas concerning Christ's knowledge of both the Father and sinful humanity in and through his crucifixion. The knowledge of the Father's will afforded by the beatific vision is not the cause of suffering in itself, but of confidence and consolation. Yet, because this same vision gives Christ intense knowledge of human evil in the world, it is also the source of both profound redemptive desire and intense agony. Jesus experiences in his ordinary consciousness as man a deeper suffering on our behalf because of this grace. N.V