

Quasi in figura: A Cosmological Reading of the Thomistic Phrase

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SUPERSESSSIONISM has been widely decried in certain circles of theology, and rightly so. But many have been so quick to root it out of theology that one may wonder precisely what we oppose and what we leave in its wake. While the Magisterium has clearly repudiated anti-Semitism, the Church has left the task of constructing a positive account of Israel's gifts to her theologians. This has proved to be a challenging task. The theologian, who cannot ignore that Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), must walk a tightrope. A step to the left, and he denies that Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and prophets (Mt 5:17); a step to the right, and he denies God's irrevocable gifts to Israel (Rom 11:28). The Pontifical Biblical Commission's statement *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* describes this balancing act as follows:

The notion of fulfillment is an extremely complex one, one that could easily be distorted if there is a unilateral insistence either on continuity or discontinuity. Christian faith recognizes the fulfillment, in Christ, of the Scriptures and the hopes of Israel, but it does not understand this fulfillment as a literal one. Such a conception would be reductionist. In reality, in the mystery of Christ crucified and risen, fulfillment is brought about in a manner unforeseen. It includes transcendence.¹

Complex indeed; one need not be the sharpest tool in the shed to recognize that this statement—with its appeal to continuity, discontinuity,

¹ The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001), §21.

reductionism, and transcendence—could be interpreted in several different, even mutually contradictory, ways, but it highlights the exegetical crux of our problem nonetheless. Salvation has a temporal structure that eludes us; even with the eyes of faith, we see through a glass darkly. Its figure is the proverbial mystery wrapped in an enigma; we cannot approach it without compounding the mystery of God's saving mercy with the well-known paradoxes of time. The philosopher may well exclaim, with Augustine, that he knows very well what time is—until someone asks—but we have been charged to give an account of our faith to anyone who asks, philosopher or not.

One of the most challenging test cases of such complexity is the question of Israel's practice of Law after the coming of Christ. As Bruce Marshall's excellent reflection indicates, the question of the continued significance of the Law—a question famously debated by Jerome and Augustine—drags us into thickets surrounding the “inherent temporal structure” of salvation. In what follows, I will offer some of my own reflections on the continued significance of the Law, which have been occasioned by Marshall's essay. I will begin by placing Aquinas's “unofficial” position in the larger Augustinian tradition of Israel as a “witness people.” After purging this older Augustinian tradition of elements that are incompatible with the present Magisterium on the election of Israel, I will then offer my own reflections on the Thomistic teaching that remains. The “figure” of Israel, I will argue, is best considered as a trans-historical reality, embodied in the mystical conception of the Law as given by angels. If we prayerfully attend to this mystery, I think we may catch a glimpse, beyond the irreducible complexity of our own history, of the more simple mystery of God's mercy.

Bruce Marshall on Thomas Aquinas

As Marshall indicates, Aquinas believes that Levitical worship was not only dead (*mortua*), but death-dealing (*mortifera*). Even though Aquinas agreed with Augustine against Jerome that Levitical worship became deadly to its practitioners only with time, that time is now well past, and those who practice the precepts of the Law are guilty of mortal sin. And so the sacraments of the New Law, containing the very grace that they signify, replace the sacraments of the Old Law, which merely attested to the Jews' faith in a Messiah to come. Before Christ's advent, Levitical worship signified this faith in a twofold manner. Literally, the cult displayed the Israelites' worship of the one, true God; figuratively, the cult pointed prophetically to the coming of Christ. But—and this is an important caveat—Aquinas believes a Jew who practices the Law sins mortally even as he worships the

one, true God. Since Levitical worship attests to a *prefigurative* faith in Christ's advent, to worship in such a way *after* Christ has indeed come is to deny, at least implicitly, that He is the promised Messiah. Because Christ alone is the mediator between God and man, the literal ratio of Levitical worship is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for saving grace. The figurative ratio is equally necessary, and the Jew who denies Christ, implicitly or explicitly, after His advent severs the link between the literal and figurative *rationes* of his own worship.

Marshall summarizes the "official" position thus: "All sacraments give the one grace of Christ, whether under the Old or the New Law. But here, at least, Aquinas attributes to the ancient rites an inherent temporal structure which makes it impossible for them to retain their figural *ratio* after Christ's advent. They no longer point at him, but away from him; they no longer attest faith in his coming, but the denial that he has come."² To this, though, Marshall contrasts an "unofficial" view, in which Aquinas suggests that Christians should permit Jewish worship and not hinder it. Aquinas notes that in Jewish worship, "we have a testimony to the truth from our enemies,"—a fairly typical invocation of the Augustinian tradition—but with a significant twist. When Jews circumcise their children and observe the Torah, "this represents to us what we ourselves believe in a kind of figure."³ Marshall concludes, "Aquinas explicitly distinguishes the prefigurative sense of Jewish worship from its present significance, and attaches to Jewish worship, even after Christ—in the synagogues of Paris—a kind of continuing figurative worth." Jewish worship, Marshall concludes, "must point to Christ in its own distinctive fashion, join the faithful worshiper to his incarnation and passion and so confer the grace of justification."⁴ Thus faithful Jews worship the one true God literally and Christ implicitly *quasi in figura*, despite their explicit denial of the Incarnation.

I am in substantial agreement with Marshall. Even so, I would prefer not to make too much of the phrase *quasi in figura* and so am inclined to soften Marshall's categorical statement "Aquinas never uses the word *quasi* unless he means it."⁵ I agree—or I think I agree—with this statement in its uncontroversial sense: I do not think Aquinas throws words around carelessly. The greater problem is determining what Aquinas does, in fact, *mean* when he uses the phrase, especially in this context. In the first place,

² Bruce Marshall, "Quasi in figura: A Brief Reflection on Jewish Election, after Thomas Aquinas," *supra*.

³ *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 10, a. 11, c.

⁴ Bruce Marshall, "Quasi in figura."

⁵ *Ibid.*

the term *figura* itself denotes a rhetorical as much as a historical dimension. A *figura* is as much a “figure” of speech as it is a “shape” of historical time. Similarly, the word *quasi* does not necessarily imply a defective form as it does in English. In other words, I am not yet convinced that the phrase *quasi in figura* requires that we see Israel as a quasi-figure rather than a figure. I am also a bit wary of describing Aquinas’s *quasi in figura* remark as a position, even an “unofficial” one. As I read him, though, Marshall does not place too much importance on the terms “official” and “unofficial.” (I probably would have called the phrase under question “subterranean,” but that betrays my Romantic sympathies. In any event, I pray everyone agrees that we cannot speak of an exoteric and esoteric teaching in the Angelic Doctor!) In any event, the Angelic Doctor might mean the phrase to mean no more than “in a manner of speaking.”

These are mere semantic quibbles, but I point them out because I think that we must unmoor the notion of such a *figura* from the shoals of our own experience of history if we wish to express Aquinas’s unofficial “position” in a way that considerably furthers Marshall’s own claims. Lest I give the wrong impression, let me quickly point out that I am *not* going to deny that salvation has an inherently temporal structure; indeed, I am going to argue that its temporal structure is reflected in every ontological order of created being. If we count ourselves successors to the fathers and great scholastics—no less St. Paul and the apostles—we would do well to remember that our order is but one of many, and the lowest, wherein the experience of time is most fragmented. No creature that lives below the moon, not even the Angelic Doctor, can escape these paradoxes. Although Aquinas explicitly agrees with Augustine against Jerome on the question of the continued significance of the Mosaic Law after Christ, his rather stark emphasis on the Incarnation’s perpendicular bisection of history is strongly colored by Jerome’s reflections, if not his temperament. I think in this case—one of the very few indeed—Aquinas simply failed to achieve a perfect synthesis. It is a mark of the saint’s enduring genius, however, that he also gives us the very tools needed to solve the problem.

The Augustinian Backdrop

Many of the passages that figure in Marshall’s interpretation of Aquinas have already been treated extensively in Jeremy Cohen’s history of the Augustinian doctrine of “Jewish witness.”⁶ In Cohen’s analysis, the very passages that Marshall discusses form the backbone of an ambiguous, unsta-

⁶ Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). See the same author’s *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

ble synthesis that undoes the previous patristic tradition and paves the way for the notions of anti-Judaism—and perhaps even anti-Semitism—of the modern period. Aquinas accordingly plays an important role in the construction of what Cohen calls the “hermeneutical Jew,” a figure created by the exigencies of Christian theology with an ambiguous and multifaceted relationship to real Jews, living and dead.⁷ These are serious charges; rarely is Aquinas thought such a revolutionary. Since Cohen claims that the writings of Aquinas mark a significant departure from the Augustinian tradition, we might do well to take a fairly long detour through his work.⁸

Although Cohen acknowledges that the “hermeneutical Jew”—perhaps even several different hermeneutical Jews—wander across the sands of the New Testament, he begins his discussion with the most difficult Pauline passages from Galatians and Romans, most notably the allegory of the two covenants (Gal 4:22–31) and the mystery of the olive tree (Rom 11:1–36), and then traces a brief history of *adversus Iudaeos* themes in the likely candidates: Melito of Sardis, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and John Chrysostom. Although Augustine did not depart significantly from these previous thinkers, his own contribution to this tradition is typically grand, and his account of Jewish witness takes pride of place in Cohen’s analysis. In arguing that living Jews served as witnesses to the truth of Christianity, Augustine not only adopted a far more moderate, even tolerant, stance than his predecessors; he granted Jews a positive, albeit limited,

⁷ For related studies, see Paula Fredriksen, “*Excaecati Occulta Iustitia Dei*: Augustine on the Jews and Judaism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 299–324; idem, “*Secundum Carnem*: History and Israel in the Theology of St. Augustine on the Destiny of Israel,” in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity. Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus*, ed. William Klingshirm and Mark Vessay (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 26–41; idem, “Augustine and Israel: Interpretatio ad litteram, Jews, and Judaism in Augustine’s Theology of History,” *Studia patristica* 38 (2001): 119–35; Franklin T. Harkins, “Nuancing Augustine’s Hermeneutical Jew: Allegory and Actual Jews in the Bishop’s Sermons,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 36 (2005): 41–64; and C.C. Pecknold, “Theo-Semiotics and Augustine’s Hermeneutical Jew,” *Augustinian Studies* 37 (2006): 27–42.

⁸ Not surprisingly, several scholars objected to some of Cohen’s earlier remarks about Thomas Aquinas. I cannot do justice to these debates here, but much useful information can be found in Dieter Berg, “*Servitus Iudaeorum*: Zum Verhältnis des Thomas von Aquin und seines Ordens zu den Juden in Europa im 13. Jahrhundert,” in *Thomas von Aquin: Werk und Wirkung im Licht neuerer Forschungen*, ed. Albert Zimmerman (Berlin, 1988), 439–58; Jean-Pierre Torrell, “*Ecclesia Iudaeorum*—Quelques jugements positifs de Saint Thomas d’Aquin à l’égard des Juifs et du Judaïsme,” in *Les Philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Âge*, vol. 3, ed. Carlos Bazán, et al. (Ottawa, 1995), 1734; and John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

presence in Christendom that influenced public policy until the late thirteenth century and “controlled the Western idea of the Jew ever since.”⁹

Augustine’s early treatments of Jews and Judaism treat the subject typologically. In the *De Genesi adversos Manicheos* (388/389) and the *De vera religione* (390/391), he interprets the history of Israel in light of the larger cosmological concerns of the hexaemeral literature.¹⁰ The seven ages of history, in which the Jews play a fundamental role, mirror the seven days of creation, and the total cycle can be expressed microcosmically as the life of a single man from birth to death. For Cohen, however, these rather spiritual concerns give way to a more mature and nuanced appreciation of the role of Jews in present Christian society in Augustine’s works after the thirty-three books of the *Contra Faustum* (397/399). For Cohen, Augustine’s decisive move is his admission of the perfect accord between the two testaments, such that all that Moses wrote pertains to Christ *in figura*, as it were. Only when this figurative link is forged can Augustine argue that the continued survival of Jews after Christ has been prefigured by Cain (Gen 4:1–15) and Ham (Gen 9:18–27). And so Cohen conveniently summarizes Augustine’s early development of the witness doctrine under three headings: (1) prefigured by the ancient murderer Cain, the Jews’ survival after the destruction of the Temple is a punishment for rejecting Christ; (2) Jews, blinded by the veil of carnality, confirm biblical prophecies about the Messiah’s refusal by his own people; (3) as a result, Jews carry the books of the Old Testament, especially the prophets, in servitude to the Church, demonstrating against her enemies that the prophecies about Christ have not been forged.

Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 58 (59), which was composed around 413/414, marks a significant change in Augustine’s teaching. Although Cohen notes that Augustine hints that Jewish perseverance in their observance of the Law is praiseworthy in both the *Contra Faustum* (397/399) and *De consensu evangelistarum* (399/400?), the idea is fully expressed only in Augustine’s works after 414, namely his one-hundred and forty-ninth letter to Paulinus of Nola (414), *De civitate Dei* (413/427), *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* (421), and the *Tractatus adversus Iudaeos* (428/429).¹¹ In these works, Jews are not merely custodians of

⁹ Cohen, *Living Letters*, 15.

¹⁰ I have slightly modified Cohen’s dates, based upon the data presented in Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A., ed., *Augustine through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), xxxv–il. These slight changes do not affect Cohen’s arguments.

¹¹ Cohen dates the *De fide rerum invisibilium* at 420/425, although Eric Plummer and the editors of *Augustine through the Ages* date it circa 400. Since this work contains four, arguably five, of the six themes Cohen highlights, including the

Scriptures that provide an independent witness to Christ, but the observers of a law that serves an identical function in Christian society. Their steadfast refusal to abandon the *forma Iudaeorum*—what a rich phrase!—serves as a model for persecuted Christians. Furthermore, a typological reading of Psalm 59:12, “Slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law,” provides the basis for an Augustinian public policy toward Jews. Cohen thus identifies three more themes in Augustine’s doctrine of Jewish witness, for a total of six: (4) the Jews’ perseverance in their observance of the Law is praiseworthy because it testifies to the truths contained in Scripture, even in the face of Roman persecution; (5) Jews must be allowed to live as observant Jews, following Psalm 59:12; but (6) Jews must be engaged and refuted in order to show the truth of Christ, even without hope of converting them, for such cannot happen until the full number of Gentiles have entered the Church.

Taken in their totality, these six themes allow the emergence of a rich exegesis of the “hardening” of Israel’s heart (Cf. Rom 11:25). Jews, for Augustine, are neither targets of evangelization nor extermination, for their blindness towards the Gospel is a mystery that admits of no human comprehension. Paradoxically, Jews serve God and the Church with their very stubbornness and ending it is akin to meddling with God’s mysterious designs: Jewish recalcitrance is necessary for Gentiles to be brought into the Church until the full number of the elect is reached. Cohen is less convincing when he attempts to demonstrate how Augustine’s mature teaching on Jewish witness comes to fruition in the identification of Jews and Judaism with a literal understanding of Scripture, a strong material emphasis on terrestrial history, and a rigorous concern for the demands of the body. He argues that Augustine’s increasing tendency to privilege the literal meaning of Scripture nourished a corresponding appreciation of the positive gifts of Israel, an appreciation that led him to retreat from the typological treatment of Israel, especially in the figure of Cain. This retreat from the spiritual meaning of Scripture is part of Augustine’s increasing preference for the gritty details of real, material history, particularly sexuality. Augustine’s identification of Israel with text, history, and body will influence the Western conception of Jews and Judaism for a considerable time. The Jew, for Augustine, is a “paradox, a set of living contradictions,”¹² part of Christendom and yet separate; bearing witness to Christ and yet blind; awaiting a future Messiah and yet stuck, perhaps hopelessly, in a perpetual antiquity. He remains, strangely, both spirit and flesh.

exegesis of Psalm 58 (59), the earlier dating arguably makes Augustine consistent across the entirety of his career.

¹² Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 60.

Aquinas and Jewish Infidelity

Cohen begins his own account of Aquinas with his advice to the Duchess of Brabant.¹³ In answering the duchess's questions about public policy, Aquinas remarks that Jews have been consigned to perpetual servitude, because of their guilt, and princes can thus confiscate their property and return it to its rightful Christian owners as long as allowances are made to ensure that Jews have basic necessities. He also recommends that Jews be distinguished by their dress in order to prevent undue fraternizing with Christians. Cohen rightly notes that Aquinas's talking points are rooted in two basic Augustinian premises and their application in canon law: Jewish servitude results from their sin, but no Christian can deprive them of their basic necessities. Aquinas does display a desire for the peaceful co-existence of Jews and Christians, and he advises the duchess to forego imposing taxes upon the Jews—taxes that would rightfully be hers nevertheless—in order to lessen the chance of Jewish blasphemy against Christ. For Cohen, the notion of Jewish blasphemy becomes the key that will distinguish Aquinas from the earlier Augustinian tradition and set the stage for later developments in Christian-Jewish relations, especially in the early modern period.

Cohen builds his case on the very passage that Marshall builds his, the question of whether the rites of unbelievers can be tolerated:

Human government is derived from divine government, and should imitate it. Although God is all-powerful and supremely good, He still allows certain evils to take place in the universe, which he could prevent, so that greater goods not be forfeited nor greater evils ensue. So in human government, too, authorities rightly tolerate certain evils, lest certain goods be lost or certain greater evils occur. . . . Consequently, although unbelievers sin in their rites, they may be tolerated, either on account of some good that results from it or some evil that is avoided. Thus because the Jews observe their rites that have foreshadowed our faith from antiquity, a good follows, namely, that our very enemies bear witness to our faith, which is represented to us, in a kind of figure.¹⁴

Aquinas here places Jews in the general category of unbelievers. Jews, Aquinas reasons, resist the faith after having accepted it figuratively.¹⁵ This resistance, while not as grave as the resistance of heretics, is still worse than that of pagans, for having accepted the figure of the faith in the Old

¹³ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Epistola ad ducissam Brabantiae*, in *Opera Omnia* 3, ed. Roberto Busa (Stuttgart, 1980), 594–95.

¹⁴ *ST* II–II, q. 10, a. 11.

¹⁵ *ST* II–II, q. 10, a. 5.

Law, Jews corrupt it by interpreting it falsely. On the other hand, since the Jews have accepted the faith in figure, they have corrupted such matters less than pagans, although more than heretics. When comparing these two descending figures, in which Jews occupy the middle between the extremes, Aquinas concludes that the former sort of resistance outweighs the latter in terms of guilt.¹⁶ Three tightly interlocking conclusions follow from situating Jews in a larger typology of unbelief. First—for good or ill—Aquinas significantly weakens the uniqueness of Jewish unbelief. Second, Aquinas further removes himself from the ancient tradition by expressly linking Judaism with heresy. Finally, for Aquinas, Jews are not merely blind, but active corrupters of the faith. While the earlier tradition emphasized their ignorance, Aquinas's typology of disbelief makes Israel's rejection an intentional act of dissent.¹⁷

According to Cohen, Aquinas consequently “took the lead” in developing the case that the rabbis of the first century knew that Jesus was both the promised Messiah and the Son of God. Having beheld the blatant signs of Christ's divinity, the rabbis corrupted them out of jealousy and hatred.¹⁸ In this, the sages of first-century Judaism become the paradigmatic heretics, for they know exactly whom they reject, and their ignorance is entirely voluntary. Cohen even bolsters his reading with Aquinas's insistence in *De malo* that willful ignorance does not mitigate sin, but rather increases it and, lest one protest too much, even shows how Aquinas argues that such willful ignorance is compatible with willful malice.¹⁹ Although Cohen does not advance as far, one could even make a case that the Jews' crucifixion of Christ is the supremely culpable sin, for the corruption of intellect and will involved therein most nearly approaches the malice of the fallen angels.

If Biblical Jews actively and knowingly denied the Messiah, even in contrast to their own professed faith, Aquinas followed the example of both William of Auvergne and John de la Rochelle in affirming the goodness and rectitude of the literal meaning of the Law. Interestingly enough, Aquinas consistently defended the literal *ratio* of the Old Law not by highlighting its distinctiveness, but precisely by appealing to its conformity to natural law:

The *rationes* of the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law can be understood in two ways. First, by reason of the divine worship which was

¹⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 6.

¹⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 2.

¹⁸ *ST* III, q. 47, a. 5.

¹⁹ *De malo*, q. 3, a. 8. Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 76; I-II, q. 78.

meant to be observed at that time. These *rationes* are literal, whether they refer to the avoidance of idolatry, recall certain divine blessings, remind men of the excellence of divinity, or make known the spiritual disposition required of worshippers of God. Secondly, their *rationes* can be understood insofar as they foreshadow Christ. These *rationes* are figurative and mystical, whether they look to Christ Himself and the Church, which pertains to the allegorical sense; to Christian morals, which pertains to the moral sense, or to the state of future glory, inasmuch as Christ delivers us, which pertains to the anagogical sense.²⁰

Here again, Cohen's interpretation of Aquinas rests upon a passage already used by Marshall. For Cohen, Aquinas cleverly expands the literal sense to include a symbolic meaning that neither prefigures Christ nor rests entirely on the way the words hang together. Cohen thus explains away an apparent contradiction in Aquinas's assertion that observances of the Old Law cannot be said to possess any inherent *ratio*.²¹ In this respect, Aquinas means only that the Law prohibits things, such as cotton polyester blends, that do not contradict the natural law. The *ratio* of the Law is thus entirely time dependent: it was meant to be observed for that time (*pro tempore illo*). In both cases, however, Aquinas seems to conceive the literal ratio of the Law negatively. It is no more than a mediation between the eternal verities of Christ and the natural law. Apart from his tantalizing remark that the ceremonial precepts allow the Israelites to recall divine blessings, which would allow for a more positive construal, Aquinas generally presents the observance of the law as a way for the ancient Israelites to fulfill the natural law while it prepares them for the coming of the future Messiah. Essentially imperfect, and yet perfect for its time, the Law is, in every sense, a self-consuming artifact, meant only to underscore its own inadequacies before passing into twilight.

Two Baroque Adjustments

Living Letters of the Law has its rough spots, to be sure—not least in its interpretation of Thomas Aquinas—but we can take heart in the resources that he has made known after certain corrections have been made. Its most serious difficulty is the artificial distance that Cohen creates between Augustine and Aquinas. Although I myself often bristle at suggestions that Aquinas is an Augustinian *tout court*—especially when they are made at the expense of other medieval traditions that followed the text of Augustine quite closely (such as the Augustinian Hermits themselves)—in this case, at least, Cohen has unduly exaggerated the differences between the

²⁰ ST I-II, q. 102, a. 2.

²¹ ST I-II, q. 102, a. 1, ad 1.

two doctors. His dependence on Markus notably voids Augustine's *magnum opus* of its grand figurative scheme and reduces it to a cipher for material, secular history—which is paradoxically turned into a figure for Jews and Judaism. This is the weakest part of Cohen's argument, for it assumes—quite against Augustine's own intentions—that the two cities are not themselves figures. But the Doctor of Grace makes it very clear that the two cities are founded on *two wills*, and this bedrock figure, expressed in the prologue of *De civitate Dei*, makes it impossible to separate Augustine's mystical understanding of Jewish blindness from Aquinas's understanding of its voluntary nature. Aquinas may well have painted a picture that was grittier, even nastier, than Augustine's, but he did not deviate from the general outlines sketched out by the Bishop of Hippo. If anything, Aquinas simply applied a few more of the darker tones of the late Augustinian palette.

In any event, we need not despair of having taken medieval theologians as our exemplars. If the theologies of Aquinas and Scotus, or for that matter Kilwardby and Grosseteste, look quaint—at their best—or virulently intolerant—at their worst—it is because they did not wrestle with the challenges that the voyages of discovery of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries posed to the Augustinian tradition. These medieval theologians imagined the “inherent temporal structure” as a horizontal line of history bisected by the vertical line of the Incarnation. In their chosen figure, the Law was effective *pro tempore illo*, that is, before the horizontal line was bisected. But, as the famous debate between Augustine and Jerome has already shown, drawing the vertical line is much, much harder than we often suppose. When called to do this, the theologian must draw the time of Christ, not simply in his earthly ministry, from conception to death, or even in his Resurrection and ascension, but rather with the full, dynamic volumes of the whole Christ. In other words, the theological determination of the *pro tempore illo* in the Augustinian tradition, tied as it is to the universal proclamation of the Gospel, resists being reduced to a single historical moment.

Renaissance and baroque theologians made two very significant adjustments to this picture after the discovery of vast numbers of people who had not heard the Gospel. Their first, rather obvious, adjustment was to jettison the idea that the Gospel had been proclaimed universally. This led them to release the idea of implicit and explicit faith from any crude historicism, as if there were a point in time, say March 30, 407 at 6:42 p.m. EST, at which the Gospel was universally proclaimed and God placed the mark of Cain upon Israel.²² This, in turn, allowed them to

²² Truth be told, the scholastic tradition never held a particularly rigorous understanding of such universal proclamation. Most scholastics, Aquinas included, still

grant the possibility that the various people they encountered preserved aspects of their old “pre-figurative” faiths.²³ In other words, baroque theologians were wont to allow all expressions of faith, even when mixed with error, to speak of Christ *quasi in figura*. This did not oblivate the tension between the literal and figural *rationes* of any implicit faith, whether Jew or Gentile, but it did allow the theologians and missionaries of the early modern world more dynamic interpretations of Augustine’s fourfold division between *ante legem*, *sub lege*, *sub gratia*, and *in pace*, at least for the religions *ante legem*.²⁴ For the theologians of the voyages of discovery, the perpendicular line with which the Incarnation bisects history is existential, as it were. The difference between an implicit, figurative faith and an explicit profession of Christian doctrine is located at the point when Christ is born in the soul. Far from lessening the impulse to evangelize—as some often suppose—the baroque expansion of the theology of implicit faith demanded it.

This leads us to a second important development. All too often we reduce the early modern missions to the overseas missions, but Renaissance and baroque theologians understood missions to be the evangelization of their own culture(s) as much as the evangelization of others’. And

imagined virtuous Turks who had not heard the Gospel as hypothetical cases of the salvation of non-Christians.

²³ I know the Jesuit literature from this period far better than I know the relevant Dominican, Franciscan, or Augustinian literature. My own research in the history of the Asian and American missions makes me suspect that there was not a single theological or missiological innovation for which the Jesuits are usually given credit that was not first attempted by the friars. Although we cannot discount the intense political hatred between the orders, the mendicants often criticized Jesuit approaches because they already had decades or even centuries of missionary experience. Ironically, most of the historically successful forms of inculturation, such as the open-air churches or monumental crosses of Mexico, resulted in territories administered by friars. I am confident that non-Jesuit theologians tackled these problems with just as much verve as Juan de Lugo or Juan Martínez de Ripalda.

²⁴ Cohen is wrong on two counts when he says that Augustine replaced the seven ages of history with a “fourfold division that emphasized the radical disjunction between epochs” (*Living Letters*, 42). The fourfold division does not replace the seven ages of history, as Cohen later admits, nor are terms *ante legem*, *sub lege*, *sub gratia*, and *in pace* material or temporal grades that an individual or the human race passes through or ascends. These four terms give us a history of the spirit, a mystical evolution of the Church from Abel to the coming of Christ. The “radical disjunction” between them can only be conceived in terms of the sacramental graces of each. In this respect, Cohen has depended a bit too heavily on F. Edward Cranz, “The Development of Augustine’s Idea on Society before the Donatist Controversy,” *Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1954): 255–316.

so early modern “missionaries” evangelized Jew as well as Gentile.²⁵ It may well be that Jews and Judaism came to be seen as targets of evangelization only after the friars departed from certain aspects of the Augustinian tradition, notably, their divinely-caused blindness, but the Augustinian tradition’s voluntarism—I use the term in its positive sense—allows theologians to apply the same theological reasoning that we have exercised on behalf of other religious groups to Jews and Judaism, and so wipe the mark of Cain from their faces.

Once the line between figure and fulfillment is construed in terms of the individual’s call and election—once the inherent temporal structure of salvation is widened and deepened—we can no longer say with scientific certainty that a Jew who practices the Law sins mortally, as Aquinas insists in his “official” position. In fact, we have every reason to believe that the Angelic Doctor’s “unofficial position” has carried the day, for the implicit faith so restored in the literal *ratio* of Jewish worship cannot but be figurative in character once we allow the baroque adjustment. Here again *Nostra Aetate* offers an instructive illustration. Although the early modern tradition generally claimed that an explicit profession of atheism always involved mortal sin, modern scholastics, facing the possibility of someone educated in an atheist country, much as their predecessors faced the possibility of the Turk or Tartar who had never heard the Gospel, generally concluded that an atheist might deny the existence of God for what he mistakenly believes are morally commendable reasons. If *Nostra Aetate* allows the possibility—obliquely, to be sure—that this theoretical atheist has not sinned mortally, how much less, then, the Jew who denies the Incarnation in fidelity to the Messiah he eagerly awaits.²⁶

Time, Law, and the Angels

For all of the merciful allowances made for men and women who lived under the ancient religions, for the new faiths encountered during the great missions, for Islam, even for individuals living under modern state-sponsored atheism, precious little has been granted to Jews. In fact, the

²⁵ In many respects, institutions like the Jesuit-run *Casa di Catechumeni* in Rome developed only after Thomas Aquinas identified Jewish unbelief as one type of voluntary infidelity. But before we make too much of Aquinas’s tolerance, we should note the parallels in his treatment of Jews and prostitutes. Cf. Lance Gabriel Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord: Jesuit Confraternities in Early Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), especially 99–124.

²⁶ A useful summary of these debates before the Second Vatican Council can be found in Riccardo Lombardi, S.J., *The Salvation of the Unbeliever*, trans. Dorothy M. White (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1956).

development of the Church's doctrine about the salvation of non-Christians seems to have progressed with willful ignorance of Israel, to whom God has given adoption, glory, the covenant, worship, and the promises, the patriarchs, and indeed, according to the flesh, the Christ (Rom 9:4–5). If we accept any variant of the modern interpretation of figurative faith—as I think *Nostra Aetate* urges us—it only makes sense to allow Jews the same privileges as Gentiles, who have no more than the sacraments of nature. While both the natural and Mosaic sacraments are fulfilled in Christ, however, the survival of the Law outside the Church is much harder to justify with Scripture. The Law, after all, has no power to justify (Rom 2:13, 3:30; Gal 2:16–19), and its practice is sternly forbidden. And yet the Law is holy (Rom 7:12) and righteous (Rom 8:14). Paul even voices his desire to “establish” it (Rom 3:31). It is, in its own right, one of the irrevocable gifts of God (Rom 11:28).

And so we have come, after our survey of Roman Catholic theologies of Jews and other non-Christians, back to the irreducible complexity of our claim that Christ fulfills the Law without abrogating it. I think our survey gives us ample reason to see a continued “pre-figurative” value in Israel's gifts, even in the Law itself. To do so, however, we must still account for the irreducible difference between faith and the Law, since the latter comes from Moses, but grace through Christ (Jn 1:17). To this end, I suggest that we best conceive this difference as the difference between eternity and time—or between eschatology and providence—such that the Law is an aeviternal reality that stands above our normal experience of history. If we attend to this more cosmological understanding of the Law, I think we can overcome some of the difficulties presented by what Marshall calls the “inherent temporal structure” of salvation history without resorting to a unilateral insistence on continuity or discontinuity. More importantly, I believe such a cosmological conception of the Law allows us to recognize the positive, enduring significance of the Law in a way that is consistent with Paul's teaching that the Law pedagogically leads one to Christ (Gal 3:24–25) and, further, that it is the economy of sin that curses all those who live under the Law (Gal 3:10).

The notion that Law was given to Israel by angels is a common scriptural motif.²⁷ The Epistle to the Hebrews says, “Thus we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word declared by angels was steadfast and every transgression or disobedience received just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great

²⁷ Readers will note that I am reprising a common theme, and several of the favorite texts, found in the writings of Jean Daniélou, S.J.

salvation?" (Heb 2:1–3). Luke also shows his indebtedness to this tradition, when he notes it in Stephen's sermon: "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who announced the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who have received the Law as an ordinance of angels, but did not keep it" (Acts 7:53). Not surprisingly, the idea is ubiquitous in the Fathers, and represented most notably in Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius.²⁸ A favorite passage comes from Hilary of Poitiers: "These flaming torches, these dazzling fires, these rumbling thunders, this terror that accompanies the entire coming of the Lord, all manifest the presence of angelic ministers, proclaiming the Law through the hand of a mediator."²⁹ In fact, some Fathers felt that the whole economy of the Old Testament was communicated to Israel by angels, which would include Levitical worship as well as inspired Scripture. Clement of Alexandria maintains "an angel initiated Abraham into the secrets of God."³⁰ Fathers such as Eusebius, Hilary, and Methodius emphasize the angelic dimensions of prophecy. Origen notes that the Temple itself was given through angelic intermediaries.³¹

Paul also stands firmly in this tradition (Gal 3:19), whose cosmological vision is echoed in his comparison of the two covenants to Hagar and Sarah (Gal 4:22–31). The "historical" narrative of Abraham and his two wives is itself a figure of Christ's advent, which Paul expresses both cosmologically and architecturally. The Old Covenant, from Sinai, is the present Jerusalem, in slavery to sin with her children; the New Covenant, however, is from above, our mother like Sarah, who gives birth to free children. Here, too, salvation has a temporal structure, but one that is considerably larger than our own. For Paul, the "old" figure is not identified with the past but with the present. It is the present age of the world that labors under sin (Gal 1:3), and it is the form of this world that is passing away. In spatial terms, the "new" is from the "heavenly places" that transcend planetary time altogether. If we emphasize the historical narrative (which divides Israel's past from the Church's present) at the expense of the cosmological (which divides the present age of the world from its eschatological realization in Jesus Christ), we cannot but fall into a punitive supersessionism. But taken together, the realized eschatology of the "new" covenant does not bisect history so much as raise us above it. If Paul urges the Galatians to "cast out the slave woman and her son" (cf.

²⁸ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 10, 15; Dionysius, *De coelesti hierarchia*, 4,2,3.

²⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, *Tract. Ps.* 67.

³⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5, 11.

³¹ Hilary, *Tract. Ps.* 118, 121; Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 7,5; Methodius, *De sanguisuga*, 7; Origen, *Comm. In Cant.* 2.

Gen 21:10), he asks them to free themselves from all things of the “present age.” Lest one worry that Paul’s own narrative appears to privilege the historical over the cosmological, we need only remark that Paul could not have been ignorant of the mysterious angelic visitation that concludes the story of Hagar.

Paul consistently describes the relationship of Jews and Christians in figures that reject the simple bisection of history. If we must use figures, it is more proper to say that the Incarnation is akin to a tangential line. From our perspective, the point at which this line intersects the circle of history is the conception of Christ. But the line itself stretches, as it were, from heaven to heaven: the nativity bears the Christ to us from heaven and the ascension lifts history beyond the stars. If the rejection of Israel means the reconciliation of the world, it is a figure of Christ’s crucifixion, and so finds itself at the crucial point at which the tangent transcends history as we normally experience it. But Paul also adduces Israel’s acceptance of the Law as a figure of the resurrection, a theological move that has two very important consequences. First, it places Israel’s acceptance under the peculiar logic of eschatological statements—or indeed ecstatic statements, which are in fact identical in the cosmology of the ancient saints. This first consequence gives rise to a second that is crucial for our considerations. If Israel’s acceptance is eschatological, Christ’s resurrection inverts the dialectic between figure and fulfillment, and the resurrection becomes a historical figure for the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in the general resurrection, when the circle of history is lifted in the ecstasy of the Eternal slain Lamb before the altar.

If we attend this ancient tradition, the difference between the New Law and the Old Law is not a difference between eternity and time—as we experience it—but rather a difference between the participated eternity of Christ and the aeivernal time of the angels. Christ, of course, is superior to the angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent (Heb 1:4). As followers of Christ, we have no need of the Law, which has been fulfilled in his perfect, eternal love (Rom 13:10). Baptized into his death, we are freed from its injunctions, and in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass we ascend with him above the temporal structures that make the Levitical sacrifices necessary. But the angels do not cease to be “ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who are to obtain salvation” (Heb 1:14). For those without faith in Christ, who are neither baptized into his death nor who partake of the fruits of his heavenly sacrifice, the Law remains steadfast and just. The temporal structure of salvation is more complex perhaps than we bargained for. It includes transcendence twice over.

Conclusions

We are now in a position to offer a brief doctrinal synthesis.

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council and later Magisterial documents mitigates several aspects of the Augustinian teaching and rejects others outright. The first three components identified by Cohen (and many of the strictures of canon law based upon them) come under immediate censure. Jews cannot be typologically identified with Cain—much less Ham!—, nor can their survival after the destruction of the Temple be seen as a curse. Their adherence to the Law and the prophets may well be an act of service to the Church, but never servitude. Once these unsavory elements have been cast away, the three components of Augustine's later teaching emerge in a new light. Jews' perseverance in the observance of the Law is indeed praiseworthy and testifies to the truth of both the Old and the New Testaments. Consequently, Jews must be allowed, even encouraged in certain respects, to live as observant Jews. A Jew who converts must be welcomed into the Church, of course, but our theological dialogues and controversies with Jews have two other aims: first, they enrich both communities by our shared study of God's word, but, more paradoxically, they make the truth of Christ known to the Gentile bystander, the full number of whom have not yet entered the Church. Lest we be wise to our own conceits, we should note that these two aims are not entirely separable; we are enriched precisely in our continued understanding that we, who were once Gentiles, have been graciously grafted on the olive tree.³²

The inherent temporal structure of the ancient rites retains both their literal and figural *rationes*, just as the Law still serves to lead people to Christ, on the one hand, and serves to represent our own faith to us *in figura*. The signs that God himself has decreed in salvation history retain their pedagogical function even when sin obscures them, and Levitical worship cannot cease to point to Christ. In this respect, the Law is neither dead nor death-dealing in itself; it is death-dealing for Christians who, having died with Christ in baptism, are freed from its injunctions (Gal 2:19). For Christians, in other words, the time of the Law is indeed past, and Christians who depend upon its works trade the imperishable for the perishable, and the eternal for the temporal, and they sin mortally when

³² I must note my indebtedness to the ideas of Stephen Fowl, "Learning to be a Gentile: Christ's Transformation and Redemption of Our Past," a paper given at the Christology and Scripture Symposium at the University of Gloucester in December, 2005. While Romans is usually cited in support of this notion, Fowl bases his own presentation of the "Christ directed perception" of our past upon Ephesians 2:11–22.

they do. The figure of the Law, indeed the *forma Iudaeorum* itself, is a form of that which is passing away (1 Cor 7:31; cf. 1 Jn 2:17). I think it crucial to note the tense of this definition: as forms of the present age, such figures have not passed away entirely, nor can they as long as the heavens remain (Mt 5:18). Like heaven and earth, and all “former things,” the carnal Law must pass (Mt 24:35; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1); it falls to the ground and dies, only to be made, in the twinkling of an eye, a spiritual law.

As creatures who live below the heavens, we simply do not enjoy a vantage point from which the spirituality of the New Law can be comprehended. Being ordered in our fallen economy to know material realities only through our senses, we see election and justification only within the temporal history that is natural to us as human beings. Except in rare cases of spiritual rapture, we ourselves cannot directly gaze upon the irrevocable gifts of God, for they, too, have been given “in heavenly places” (Cf. Eph 1:20, 2:6). The beloved of God, Israel, will be a witness people until the eschatological fulfillment of his promises, when God’s law is written on every heart, the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile is abolished, the Gospel is universally promulgated, on the day that Christ is all in all (Phil 1:6). This witness is not merely negative, but is a figure of things to come and, as such, is a continued source of prevenient grace for Jews. In this respect, I see no problem in granting that the sacraments and ceremonies of the Old Law mediate Christ’s salvation to Israel, as long as we also insist upon the superiority of the New Law over the Old Law, and the necessity of preaching the Gospel to circumcision and uncircumcision alike.

Have I also constructed a hermeneutical Jew? I suppose I have, but could I do otherwise? I pray I am not guilty of special pleading if I persist in the hope—following that great Augustinian suggestion—that a properly Christian hermeneutic can actually increase our love for those brought into its orbit. None of us, after all, reads Scripture alone; we read the book of nature, a marvelous little piece of writing that just happens to have some very lively Jewish characters, saints and sinners alike, and several of my dear friends. My own rough words will always be fragmentary, but if God can use things as well as words to signify, there can be no difference, in the divine writing of the world, between the historical and the hermeneutical Jew. N V