

NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN ROMANS: PATRISTIC AND MEDIEVAL INTERPRETATION

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IN THIS PERIODICAL David M. Coffey wrote some time ago: "It is the same God who appeared in Jesus Christ who reveals Himself also in the universe."¹ These words constitute a summary of sorts of the middle position that he takes between two extreme interpretations of Rom 1. One extreme Coffey finds represented by Karl Barth. It holds that the knowledge of God in the Gentiles is a knowledge in Christ, i.e., faith, not a science derived from natural theology. The other extreme Coffey discovers in Catholic theologians who, seemingly with Vatican I, read Rom 1:20 "as speaking of a purely natural knowledge of God"² to the exclusion of faith.

Coffey's own middle position understands Rom 1 as a real natural knowledge integrated into faith. His main argument for this position seems to be based upon his interpretation of Rom 1:19b as referring to the past act of God's creation. The Gentiles did know God, like Adam, before they sinned through idolatry. Therefore, their knowledge, like Adam's, was "a knowledge from revelation, a knowledge of faith."³ Since, however, they knew God from His creation too, their knowledge was one not of pure faith or reason but of reason integrated into faith.

Barth's accusation that Catholic theology, and Vatican I in particular, opposes itself to the unity of God by distinguishing between God as Creator (known by reason) and God as Redeemer (known by faith) is rejected by Coffey; for his own middle position maintains that the natural knowledge of God is "always integrated into the knowledge of faith."⁴ He then adds: "It is the same God who appeared in Jesus Christ who reveals Himself also in the universe."⁵

It is this statement that, more than anything else, deserves further consideration. To be more explicit, the reader familiar with Coffey's article expects perhaps critical remarks concerning Coffey's interpretation of Romans, of Vatican I, etc. However, the point made in Coffey's article may be more important than, and not necessarily dependent upon, some of his preliminary considerations.

His statement that "it is the same God who appeared in Jesus Christ who reveals Himself also in the universe" is perhaps more encompassing

¹"Natural Knowledge of God: Reflections on Romans 1:18-32," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 31 (1970) 674-91, at 684.

²*Ibid.*, p. 674.

³*Ibid.*, p. 680.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 683.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 684.

than his cautious conclusions. One may want to think, e.g., of what Old and New Testament proclaim about the Word of God with regard to the universe, and wonder if knowledge of God is possible that bypasses the Word of God. Then again, one may want to think of what Old and New Testament proclaim about Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and wonder if knowledge of the universe is possible that does not relate to the Word of God, or to Jesus Christ for that matter. Perhaps we should formulate the question in much more straightforward terms. Since Paul in Romans proclaims the gospel of God about His Son, do we have to assume that 1:18 ff. is a non-Christological text, or is there no other knowledge of God in the universe than that of the Word of God? Is Paul's interpretation of Deuteronomy in Rom 10:6-8 a bad example of rabbinic exegesis, or do we have to understand that the Word of God is indeed close by, in everyone's mouth and heart? These questions, of course, concern no longer reason and faith but Christ and the universe. Or rather, they concern reason and faith because they concern Christ and the universe.

To develop Coffey's statement we would, therefore, like to move into the Christology of Romans in order to return later, from there, to the question of reason and faith. Our inquiry will concern the Greek and Latin exegesis, particularly of Rom 1:18 ff. It will show that the Christological interpretation of this text is a constant element in the entire tradition as far as we have been able to study it so far, i.e., until the thirteenth century. We will then try to formulate what this implies for the interpretation of Romans and for the understanding of faith and natural knowledge.⁶

GREEK EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 1

Origen (ca. 185-253/54) understands all human knowledge of God as divine revelation,⁷ according to Rom 1:20: "God has made it known to

⁶The research reported in this article is based on the commentaries on Romans printed in Migne's Greek and Latin series, except for some Latin works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Critical editions have been used where available. A few Greek and Latin commentaries that contain nothing but repetitions or quotations from earlier works have been omitted.

⁷On Rom 1:18-19: "ea quidem quae ad sapientes saeculi de veritatis scientia pervenerunt, Deo revelante pervenerunt" (PG 14, 862B); "veritas quam Deo revelante cognoverant" (*ibid.*); "Quam veritatem agnovisse credendi sunt homines naturalibus et a Deo animae insitis rationibus" (863B). On Rom 1:20-23: "cum manifestante Deo cognoverint Deum" (864C). On Rom 1:24-25: "veritatem quam Deo revelante cognoscunt" (865A). On Rom 1:18: "God revealed the truth to all men by way of the physical reality," according to one of the fragments of the Greek text published by A. Ramsbotham, "The Commentary of Origen on the Epistle to the Romans," *Journal of Theol. Stud.* 13 (1912-13) 215, 16-17.

them." He emphasizes Christ's role in two ways, as creating and as revealing. For the former, with regard to "the invisible things" in Rom 1:20, he quotes, and comments upon, Col 1:16: "through Him, i.e., through Jesus Christ, were made all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible."⁸ Concerning Christ's revealing role, Origen quotes Mt 11:27: "No one knows the Son except the Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wants to reveal Him."⁹

In his exposition of Rom 1:24-25, Origen quotes Scripture as saying: "I put in front of you life and death, fire and water,"¹⁰ and he explains: "Life, then, is Christ, death is. . .the devil. The soul, then, is free to choose, if she so desires, life, Christ; or to lean towards death, the devil."¹¹ In the same context, speaking about the fulfilment of God's commands, Origen quotes Jn 14:23 as follows: "I and the Father shall come and make our home with him."¹²

On Rom 2:6-11, "He will repay each one as his works deserve. For those who sought renown and honor and immortality by always doing good there will be eternal life; for the unsubmitive. . .there will be anger and fury. . .Jews first, but Greeks as well. God has no favorites" (Jerusalem Bible), Origen comments: "When, e.g., in judging you committed favoritism towards someone who is powerful, or when you suppressed the truth for a friend's sake, you did not honor justice or truth as you should have, but you dishonored justice and defamed truth; and since Christ is justice, holiness, and truth (1 Cor 1:30), you will be like those who hit Christ with their fists, spat in His face, struck His head with a reed, and crowned Him with thorns."¹³

In Rom 10:6 ff. Paul quotes, and comments upon, Dt 30:12-14, "Do not say in your heart, who will go up towards heaven, i.e., to bring Christ down," etc., and "close by you is the word." Hereupon Origen has, among other things, the following comment: "We should not say in our hearts or think that Christ is contained within a certain place and that He is not everywhere and present in everything; for when He was on earth, He said that He was also in heaven."¹⁴ And further: "You should understand Christ as the Word, the truth, the wisdom, and the justice of God. These, then, are not sought in a certain place, they are everywhere."¹⁵

John Chrysostom (ca. 345-407) probably preached his Homilies on Romans in Antioch. Commenting on Rom 1:18, he commends the prudence of Paul, who first announces the good news of Christ's coming

⁸ PG 14, 864B. ⁹ On Rom 1:18-19 (PG 14, 864A); see Lk 10:22.

¹⁰ PG 14, 866C; see Dt 30:15, 19; Sir 15:16-17. ¹¹ PG 14, 866C-D. ¹² PG 14, 868A.

¹³ PG 14, 882B; see Mt 26:67, Mk 15:17, 19. ¹⁴ PG 14, 1162A. ¹⁵ PG 14, 1162B.

and only then the condemnation that might follow.¹⁶ The revelation of God's wrath is really Christ's judgment, but Paul uses the more general expression because he is writing to neophytes. For that reason, Chrysostom explains, Paul does not mention clearly and openly the coming to judgment of the Son of God, but speaks in terms that are familiar to his listeners.¹⁷ With regard to Rom 1:19-20, we miss an explicit mentioning of Christ. God's revelation, the homily states, is not "a voice from on high," but God did more than that. He created the world, thus making it possible "for the wise and for the uneducated, for Scythians and barbarians" to see the beauty of the visible things and to rise up to God. The heavens, the harmony of the universe, the unfailing law of night and day, the fixed order of winter, spring, and other seasons, the balance of gale and tide in the ocean, all these proclaim the Creator.¹⁸

Only fragments have been preserved of commentaries by Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428) and Gennadius (+ 471).

The commentary by Cyril of Alexandria (+ 444) concerns merely selected texts from Romans. It so happens that 1:20 is commented upon. However, Cyril's only statement is that the corruptible creatures must acknowledge that the Creator has to be incorruptible.¹⁹

Theodoret of Cyr (393-ca. 460) takes the words "from heaven" in Rom 1:18 for the following comment: "He says that (the anger of God) will be revealed from heaven, because our God and Saviour will appear from there. For this says the Lord Himself also: "Then you will see the Son of man coming in the clouds. . . .'"²⁰ In this Theodoret obviously concurs with John Chrysostom.

One more element of the Greek tradition should be mentioned here. Theophylact (+ ca. 1108), in his commentary on Rom 1:19-21, with regard to "everlasting power" and "deity" in Rom 1:20, states: "One of the Fathers explains the everlasting power as the Son, the deity as the Holy Spirit."²¹ The remarkable aspect of this statement is that none of the commentaries studied here²² contains this explanation but many Latin commentaries do.

LATIN EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 1

A commentary on Romans of unknown authorship, composed in Rome under Pope Damasus between 366 and 384, traditionally printed among

¹⁶ PG 60, 411. ¹⁷ PG 60, 411-12. ¹⁸ PG 60, 412-13.

¹⁹ PG 74, 776A-B. ²⁰ PG 82, 61; see Mk 13:26, Lk 21:27. ²¹ PG 124, 353.

²² These include, further, John of Damascus (ca. 675-749), whose commentary did not bring anything particularly relevant to our research, and a commentary in the name of Oecumenius (sixth century) that was allegedly composed not earlier than the end of the eighth century. See J. Schmid, "Oikumenios," *Lexicon f. Theol. u. Kirche* 7 (2nd ed., 1962) 1122-23.

the works of Ambrose, now edited under the Erasmian coinage Ambrosiaster, is, with Origen's commentary, one of the main sources of Latin exegetical works on Romans. Ambrosiaster considers Rom 1:17 and 18 as belonging together: "As in him who believes God's justice is revealed... so in him who does not believe impiety and injustice are revealed."²³ Ambrosiaster's Christological exegesis is very pronounced. After stating that faith corresponds to God's revelation,²⁴ he explains God's eternal power as "Christ, through whom God made what did not exist, and in whom it subsists."²⁵ And he adds: "Even if His person was not acknowledged, at least His works were manifest."²⁶ When in Rom 1:25 God is "blessed for ever," so elsewhere is Christ (Rom 9:5). "Either both statements apply to Christ, or Paul made the same statement about Christ that he made about the Father."²⁷

Augustine's exegesis of some "propositions" from Romans contains no statements that are relevant here, although Rom 1:18 is briefly commented upon.²⁸ More promising sounds a comment on Rom 1:3 in his unfinished commentary on Romans: "He is the Word of God, through whom everything has been made";²⁹ but here Augustine soon took off on a tangent about sin against the Holy Spirit and never returned to the text of Romans.

An orthodox version of the commentary by Pelagius was edited by Cassiodorus and some of his followers.³⁰ Lacking in Pelagius' text but present here is the statement "Christ is eternal, for He is the power and the wisdom of God."³¹

The commentary of Rabanus Maurus (780-856) borrows frequently from Origen and Ambrosiaster. It mentions, with regard to Rom 1:20, Origen's reference to Mt 11:27 and Lk 10:22³² and Ambrosiaster's understanding of Christ as the power of God.³³ Frequently, other Christological references are taken from the same sources.

Another author sometimes close to Origen is Haimo of Auxerre (+ ca. 855). His commentary on Rom 10:6 ff. is particularly interesting. Not

²³ Henricus. J. Vogels, ed., *Ambrosiastri qui dicitur commentarius in epistulas Paulinas* (CSEL 81/1, 38, 11-13).

²⁴ "Deus enim illis manifestavit. manifestavit se deus, dum opus fecit, per quod possit agnosci per fidem" (*ibid.*, 41, 4-5). The words "per fidem" are lacking in the primary manuscripts, "a" and "b" (*ibid.* 40, 4). They occur in manuscript "c" and also in PL 17, 57A.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 40, 22-23. "Christus" occurs in manuscript "b", not in "a".

²⁶ *Ibid.* 40, 23-24. ²⁷ *Ibid.* 48, 26-27.

²⁸ *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistola ad Romanos* (PL 35, 2063).

²⁹ PL 35, 2090; see Jn 1:1 ff.

³⁰ See Jos. Martin, "Primasius," *Lexicon f. Theol. u. Kirche* 8 (2nd ed., 1963) 761.

³¹ PL 68, 419C; see 1 Cor 1:24.

³² PL 111, 1296B; see n. 9 above. ³³ *Ibid.* 1296D; see n. 25 above.

only does he repeat Origen's statement about Christ's ubiquity³⁴ without mentioning his source, but he goes on to interpret Rom 10:8, "Close by you is the word," in even more explicit terms. One can understand this, says Haimo, as the word of the law. "However, in a higher sense, it is that word about which John says 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' Thus, because the Word was God, it was close by, in their mouths and their hearts, for it permeates everything (*omnia replet*)."³⁵

One more element comes to the fore. Where Rom 13:8 states that "he who loves his neighbor fulfils the law," the tradition had commented without special emphasis. Origen, e.g., wrote: "Surely he who does not love his neighbor does not know Christ."³⁶ In Haimo appears a new aspect (within the context of the commentaries on Romans) that will continue to be discussed in later works. "How can the Apostle say that the law is fulfilled by loving the neighbor *only*? The solution is that in the love of neighbor the love of God is also given; for one cannot love the neighbor without God, nor God without the neighbor."³⁷

The commentary on Romans by Atto of Vercelli (ca. 885–960) often borrows from various works of Augustine and has strongly Christological elements, quoting John 1:1 ff. at Rom 1:3, etc. Nothing special appears with regard to Rom 1:18 ff. but for 10:6 ff. Atto depends on Origen.³⁸ Interesting, on 13:8, is the shift with reference to Haimo: "He who loves God certainly loves the neighbor, for God commands to love the neighbor; and he who loves the neighbor certainly loves God, for he fulfils God's commandment."³⁹

A rather short commentary by Lanfranc (ca. 1005–1089) borrows mainly from Ambrosiaster and Augustine.⁴⁰

Bruno (ca. 1032–1101), founder of the Carthusians, introduces with regard to Rom 1:19 a distinction between potentiality and act.⁴¹ To some God has actually revealed Himself, e.g., to Plato and some philosophers.⁴² In doing so, He has potentially revealed Himself to every-

³⁴ PL 117, 450A; see n. 14 above. ³⁵ *Ibid.* 450C. ³⁶ PG 14, 1232B.

³⁷ PL 117, 482C. ³⁸ PL 134, 231B-D; see nn. 14 and 15 above.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 261C-D. ⁴⁰ PL 150, 103–56.

⁴¹ Origen, on Rom 10:4–11, had already made use of that distinction. Referring to Christ's ubiquity as the Word of God, and quoting Jn 1:26 ("Among you stands he whom you do not know"), Origen states that Christ is among them "possibilitate... non efficacia." However, among those to whom Christ says "Wherever two or three are together in my name..." (Mt 18:20), there He is "efficacia vel efficientia" (PG 14, 1163A-B).

⁴² Note that Bruno takes care to say "Plato enim et quidam philosophi naturaliter cognoverunt esse unum Creatorem omnium, non tamen sine adjutrice gratia Dei" (PL 153, 24A-B).

one else as well.⁴³ God's eternal power, in Rom 1:20, is "the Son, who is called the power and the wisdom of God."⁴⁴ Interesting is Bruno's comment on Rom 10:20 and Is 65:1, "I was found by those who did not seek me." He specifies: "who did not seek me with their natural reason that I had given them in order that they might know me."⁴⁵

Peter Abelard (1079–1142), treating of Rom 1:19 and God's revelation, does not hesitate to assert that "many overt testimonies about the Trinity are found in the works of the philosophers"⁴⁶ who believed what we now believe. Then, however, he goes on to restrict this revelation and to exempt from it completely the mystery of God's incarnation, which human reason could in no way conceive of on the basis of God's visible creation.⁴⁷ On Rom 1:20 Abelard comments that the wisdom of God is the Son, whom the Apostle (1 Cor 1:24) calls the power and the wisdom of God. "The Evangelist calls this wisdom, Word, . . . the philosopher calls it mind, born out of God."⁴⁸

A commentary by William of St. Thierry (+ 1149) introduces itself as compiled out of Augustine, "Ambrose," Origen, some other doctors, and several contemporary masters⁴⁹—which seems a fair evaluation.

Herveus of Bourg-Déols (ca. 1080–1149/50), on Rom 1:19, seems to agree entirely with Abelard's opinion that man could not possibly know about the mystery of the Incarnation.⁵⁰ With many of his predecessors he admits the possibility of understanding the "eternal power" in Rom 1:20 as the Son, the "deity" as the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ On Rom 10:6–8 he fol-

⁴³ *Ibid.* The reference to Plato and the philosophers is also patristic heritage—not, however, the way Bruno combines the patristic data.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 24B. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 91B.

⁴⁶ Victor Cousin, ed., *Petri Abaelardi opera* 2 (Paris, 1859) 172.

⁴⁷ "Et attende diligenter dictum quod notum est Dei illis revelatum fuisse, hoc est eos credidisse ea quae nunc credimus de his quae ad divinitatem quidem pertinent potius quam ad divinae Incarnationis mysterium. Mysterium quippe Incarnationis ex visibilibus Dei operibus nequaquam concipi humana poterat ratione, sicut potentia Dei, et sapientia ejus, et benignitas ex his quae videbant liquide percipiebantur" (*ibid.*). This seems to contradict other statements by Abelard (e.g., in the *Theologia "Summi Boni"* and in the *Theologia christiana*) to the effect that such knowledge was existent in the "philosophers." See D. E. Luscombe, *The School of Peter Abelard: The Influence of Abelard's Thought in the Early Scholastic Period* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969) pp. 186–87 (where the text of Abelard's commentary on Romans is not mentioned), and also pp. 231–32 on the "Sententiae Parisienses II."—Did Abelard change his mind after the reactions of Hugh of St. Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux? Has his commentary on Romans been interpolated? Did Abelard, without contradicting his other statements, react against certain speculations (in the wake) of Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus homo*?

⁴⁸ *Loc. cit.* ⁴⁹ *PL* 180, 547–694, at 547 A-B.

⁵⁰ *PL* 181, 610B; see n. 47 above.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 611B.

lows Origen concerning Christ's ubiquity.⁵² He also discusses love of God and neighbor with regard to Rom 13:8.⁵³

The *Cambridge Commentary* (probably between 1141 and 1152⁵⁴) on Rom 1:19 follows Abelard in admitting knowledge of the Trinity but not of the Incarnation.⁵⁵ The power in Rom 1:20 is "the Son, i.e., the wisdom of God."⁵⁶ Love of neighbor is "for the sake of God" and therefore "comprehends" the love of God.⁵⁷

Peter Lombard (+ 1160) shares Abelard's opinion with regard to Rom 1:19: "Many things concerning God cannot be known by nature, such as the mystery of redemption and incarnation."⁵⁸ While commenting on Rom 1:20, he distinguishes three kinds of vision: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual. The last is meant by the Apostle. Referring to Mt 5:8 ("Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"), he then states: "In this vision God is seen when the heart is purified through the piety of faith, and through the acknowledgment of outstanding mores (*per agnitionem morum optimorum*)."⁵⁹ As so many before him, Peter Lombard considers the possibility of understanding the "eternal power" as the Son, and the "deity" as the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰ The word that is close by, Rom 10:8, can be understood as either Christ, the Word that is with the Father in the beginning, or as Christ's preaching and doctrine.⁶¹ Peter Lombard then quotes one of Augustine's most famous texts, from the *Tracts on the Gospel of John*, containing Augustine's "definition" of sacrament.⁶² On Rom 13:8 he states: "Neither can God be loved without the neighbor, nor the neighbor without God."⁶³

Robert of Melun (ca. 1090–1167) understands the eternal power of Rom 1:20 as "the person of the Son, for the Father does everything through His wisdom."⁶⁴ Robert introduces four ways of knowing God: two are interior, i.e., nature (natural reason) and grace; two are exterior,

⁵² *Ibid.* 742D–743A; see nn. 14 and 15 above.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 778D–779A.

⁵⁴ Artur Landgraf, ed., *Commentarius Cantabrigiensis in epistolas Pauli e schola Petri Abaelardi 1: In epistolam ad Romanos* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1937) pp. xv–xvi.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁵⁸ *PL* 191, 1326C.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 1328B.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 1328C.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 1475B.

⁶² "Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum. . . . Unde ista tanta virtus aquae, ut corpus tangat et cor abluat, nisi faciente verbo: non quia dicitur, sed quia creditur?", where Augustine quotes Rom 10:8 (*Tract. in ev. Jo.* 15, 3 [*PL* 35, 1840]).

⁶³ *PL* 191, 1507C.

⁶⁴ Raymond M. Martin, ed., *Oeuvres de Robert de Melun 2* (Louvain, 1938) 25, 2–4. Martin, in his apparatus, quotes from the commentary on Romans by Gilbert Porreta: "Nota per invisibilia Patrem, per virtutem Filium, per divinitatem Spiritum Sanctum intelligi."

i.e., creation and Scripture.⁶⁵ He mentions the question of knowledge of the Incarnation in the Gentiles, only to say that they could not have understood this mystery by natural reason.⁶⁶ On Rom 13:8 Robert emphasizes the connection of love of neighbor and love of God. The main thrust of his argument seems to be that real love of neighbor, i.e., for the sake of God, presupposes love of God.⁶⁷

A commentary printed among the works of Hugh of St. Victor is probably the product of a canon of St. Victor (1155–65⁶⁸) who borrowed extensively from Robert of Melun.⁶⁹ It mentions the possibility of understanding the eternal power in Rom 1:20 as the Son, the deity as the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ The four ways of knowing God are reproduced, more or less as in Robert.⁷¹ However, Robert seemed to consider the two interior ways as two aspects of one knowledge, i.e., natural reason helped by grace. The anonymous commentator is perhaps somewhat less careful when he distinguishes natural reason and divine inspiration. In one of the “questions” concerning Rom 1:18–20 it is asked if natural reason is capable of anything without the help of God’s grace. Some answer in the affirmative, referring to philosophers who by mere natural reason came to know about God’s existence, His unity, and His trinity. The commentator, however, thinks that they did not achieve this without the help of God’s grace.⁷² Rom 13:8 provokes a discussion of the relation between

⁶⁵ “... IIIor sunt modi quibus Deus cognoscitur: duo interiores, duo exteriores. De interioribus unus per naturam; habemus enim naturalem rationem qua in Dei cognitionem erigimur. Alter vero per gratiam, cuius illuminatione ad Dei cognitionem pervenimus; sine qua gratia naturalis ratio nichil proficit. De exterioribus unus per creaturam, alter per scripturam habetur” (*ibid.*, p. 25, 14–20).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29, 5–7.

⁶⁷ “Nemo proximum diligere potest nisi Deum diligat. Est enim dilectio proximi motus mentis in proximum propter Deum. Quod quidem esse non potest, nisi Deus diligatur” (*ibid.*, p. 155, 15–18).

⁶⁸ P. Glorieux, “Essai sur les ‘Quaestiones in epistolas Pauli’ du Ps.-Hughes de Saint-Victor,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 19 (1952) 48–59, at 54, 59.

⁶⁹ Raymond M. Martin, “L’Oeuvre théologique de Robert de Melun,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 15 (1914) 456–89.

⁷⁰ Qu. 34 (*PL* 175, 439C).

⁷¹ “Quatuor enim modis cognoscitur Deus, duobus modis interioribus, scilicet per naturalem rationem: quam notat Apostolus secundum quosdam, dicens: Quod notum est Dei, manifestum est in illis, et per divinam inspirationem, quam ibi notat Apostolus: Deus enim illis manifestavit. Duobus modis exterioribus, per facturam quemadmodum insinuat Apostolus, dicens: Invisibilia Dei, et per Scripturam” (*ibid.*, 439D).

⁷² Qu. 40 (*PL* 175, 441B–C). In the sixth book of the *Allegoriae in Novum Testamentum* the following comment is made on Rom 2:14 (“they do by nature what the law orders”): “id est non adjuti per legem, sed sola naturali ratione reformata per gratiam. Istud ergo naturaliter legem et non gratiam excludit” (*PL* 175, 883D–884A). Glorieux (*op. cit.*, n. 68) thinks that the *Allegoriae* can be attributed to the same author who compiled the *Quaestiones*.

love of God and love of neighbor.⁷³

The commentary of Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) received its final redaction probably during his second teaching period in Paris, 1269–72. “From heaven” in Rom 1:18 evokes Acts 1:11 about Christ’s return for judgment.⁷⁴ The commentary of Thomas on Rom 1:19 is notably and significantly different from the opinions expressed by Abelard, Hervéus, Peter Lombard, and others, on the impossibility of man’s conceiving God’s incarnation. Thomas admits their basic idea, that God is unknowable, but without their specifications. Surely “something concerning God is entirely unknown to man in this life, viz., what God is,” because man’s proper object, the sensible world, does not adequately represent God’s nature.⁷⁵ Then, without mentioning Robert of Melun’s four ways of knowing God or Peter Lombard’s three kinds of vision, Thomas states that man is able to know God *in this way* (i.e., on the basis of the sensible world) with three qualifications. Man can know God as cause of the world, as transcending it, and as inadequately represented by it.⁷⁶ Finally, Thomas here considers not different ways of divine revelation (as was at least suggested by the distinction between divine inspiration and natural reason in the anonymous commentary printed among the works of Hugh of St. Victor) but two aspects of it. One man notifies another by some exterior sign, e.g., words or “scripture.” God notifies man in two respects, i.e., by giving him his capacity of understanding and by way of exterior signs, i.e., the visible world.⁷⁷ Thomas thereby refuses to give a special place to Scripture, notoriously mentioned as a sign between men but completely absent with regard to God’s revelation. Robert of Melun could consider creation and Scripture as two different ways whereby men can reach divine knowledge. For Thomas, the one way in which God’s revelation is open to man is through God’s Wisdom or Word.

⁷³ Qu. 302–304 (PL 175, 505C–506B).

⁷⁴ *Expositio in ep. ad Rom.* 1, lect. 6 (ed. Vivès [Paris, 1876] 20, 398 a; we will use a and b to indicate first and second column).

⁷⁵ “Aliquid circa Deum est omnino ignotum homini in hac vita, scilicet quid est Deus . . . et hoc ideo, quia cognitio hominis incipit ab his quae sunt ei connaturalia, scilicet a sensibilibus creaturis, quae non sunt proportionatae ad representandam divinam essentiam” (*ibid.* 1, lect. 6, p. 398b).

⁷⁶ “Potest tamen homo ex huiusmodi creaturis Deum tripliciter cognoscere, ut Dionysius dicit libro *De divinis Nominibus*. Uno quidem modo per causalitatem. . . . Secundo per viam excellentiae. . . . Tertio per viam negationis. . . .” (*ibid.*).

⁷⁷ “Unus homo alteri manifestat, explicando conceptum suum per aliqua signa exteriora, puta per vocem vel scripturam; Deus autem dupliciter aliquid homini manifestat. Uno modo infundendo lumen interius, per quod homo cognoscit. . . . Alio modo proponendo suae sapientiae signa exteriora, scilicet sensibles creaturas” (*ibid.* 1, lect. 6, pp. 398b–399a).

Thomas' commentary on Rom 1:20 continues to emphasize creation as God's revelation and the basis for man's knowledge of God. He mentions that the *glossa* understands God's "eternal power" as the Son.⁷⁸ Thomas obviously shares the Christological understanding of the (entire) text but avoids what he considers a forced interpretation of certain terms. He does not have that reservation in the proper context, e.g., with regard to Rom 8:32⁷⁹ or 11:36.⁸⁰

"By nature" in Rom 2:14, whichever way it is understood, implies "the grace of Christ"⁸¹ which the commentary emphasizes again with regard to Rom 5:1.⁸² Of course, Paul can interpret Deuteronomy Christologically in Rom 10:6-7; for Christ is the Word of God in whom are all God's commandments.⁸³

One last element should be mentioned where Thomas is much more blunt than any of his predecessors, i.e., Rom 13:8. Paul can state the love of neighbor as the only commandment because "in the love of neighbor the love of God is included as a cause is included in its effect. . . . Conversely, the love of neighbor is included in the love of God as an effect is included in its cause."⁸⁴ Thomas is not satisfied with a simple statement of inclusion, as was Haimo, nor with a reference to God's command, as was Atto, nor with an unexplained (or falsely understood) love "for the sake of God," as were some of his more immediate predecessors. His argument is clear and straight. The cause is *included* in the effect. Therefore, there is only one love, and there is no need for more than one commandment.

FACTS IN THE TRADITION

The history of the interpretation of Romans in Greek and Latin tradition until the thirteenth century seems to involve several indubitable conclusions, if one may use that term in a theological context:

1) The Christological interpretation of Rom 1:18 ff. is a fact. One may question the impact of this fact in each of the commentaries quoted here. One may, therefore, question the consistency of the theology and Christology of every single commentator. However, a history of the theological tradition is primarily concerned with the continuity

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 1, lect. 6, p. 400a. ⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 8, lect. 6, p. 501b, with reference to Col 1:17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 11, lect. 5, pp. 547b-548b, with reference to Jn 1:3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 2, lect. 3, p. 417a-b. ⁸² *Ibid.* 5, lect. 1, p. 446a.

⁸³ "Nec est inconveniens, si quod Moyses dixit de mandato legis, hoc Apostolus attribuit Christo; quia Christus est Verbum Dei, in quo sunt omnia Dei mandata" (*ibid.* 10, lect. 1, p. 526b).

⁸⁴ "In dilectione proximi includitur dilectio Dei, sicut causa includitur in effectu. . . . Et e converso dilectio proximi includitur in dilectione Dei, sicut effectus in causa" (*ibid.* 13, lect. 2, p. 566b).

of occurrence of certain data, rather than with their consistency within the theoretical framework of the individual representatives. That all of them affirm it, rather than how each one explains it, is the important fact here.

2) The Christology of this tradition considers Christ as the Word and the Wisdom of God, and refers without any reservation to many other places in the New Testament where Christ is described as the one through whom everything has been created, in whom it exists, etc. In the same context, or in others (e.g., Rom 10:6 ff.), this tradition applies to Christ what is said in the Old Testament about God's Word, His Wisdom, His Law, etc. Again, this fact, not primarily its consistent interpretation, is important.

3) The text of Romans is always understood as speaking about divine revelation, i.e., God revealing Himself. The fact that God reveals Himself in His creation, i.e., in nature, does not (yet) lead to the terminology of natural and supernatural revelation.

4) Corresponding to this revelation is man's knowledge, which, because it is knowledge of God, through revelation and with the help of God's grace, is often called faith.

REFLECTION ON THE TRADITION

A study of Romans and of its interpretation in East and West cannot but reveal a curious phenomenon. When one puts Romans aside, and starts reading and studying authors such as John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, etc. (with Origen it is perhaps a slightly different matter), one is confronted with a change of interest, a shift in perspective. The study of Romans raises a number of questions, opens up avenues of interpretation, that one expects to see treated and answered in the commentaries. That expectation is only partially fulfilled. The commentaries obviously address themselves to a different audience than Romans, in different circumstances. Romans has to do with a world divided into Jews and Gentiles, and preaches a gospel that transcends Judaism's exclusive claim on God. It proclaims God's concern for Jews and Gentiles alike, and addresses itself to both. The commentaries address themselves to neither, but to a third party, the Christian community. It is not my intention to formulate or repeat accusations of Hellenization, Romanization, or falsification of the original Christian message. But it is a simple historical fact (supported in this case by the commentaries mentioned) that the sociological reality of the Christian group brings with it a shift in emphasis and in perspective that tends to influence the interpretation of Romans (to mention only this, since it is our special object of research

here). It is a question, not of falsification or "heresy," but of subtle changes in emphasis.

As stated above, it is characteristic of the period of tradition studied here that revelation in Rom 1:18 ff. is understood as God's self-revelation without the distinctions that particularly late-scholastic theology was to introduce into the field. On the other hand, all knowledge of God is understood as faith borne by God's grace.

This is true, but it is not the whole story. The fact is that, according to the commentaries, the Jews and the Gentiles *know less* about God than the Christians. The Christians, i.e., the preacher or commentator and his audience, have a *fuller* revelation and a *fuller* faith than both Jews and Gentiles. He, and they, identify with the author of Romans. They share his knowledge and convictions about Jesus Christ, who was born, suffered, died, and rose from the dead. And so, though it is the same revelation and the same faith that Christians share with Jews and Gentiles, the former, in some way or other, share *more* of it than the latter. This "more" is Christ, whom the Christians confess to be God's Word and Wisdom who creates the world and enjoys dwelling among men, to whom He, the Son, reveals the Father, i.e., to Jews and Gentiles alike. Or does He—according to the commentaries?

That is one of the main questions confronting us in the tradition, and it does not really matter whether we call it Christology, revelation, or faith. If one wanted to formulate the point in extreme, and cynical, terms, one might feel tempted to say: Paul proclaimed the gospel of Christ who tears down the wall that divides Jews and Gentiles (see Eph 2:14); the commentaries preach the gospel of Christ who builds the wall that surrounds the bastion of Christianity and divides it from Jews and Gentiles alike.

This hypothetical cynicism serves its purpose if it brings across the one element within the Christian tradition that the commentaries seem to add to Romans. That element is the "more" (1) in revelation and (2) in faith (3) about Christ that permeates the entire tradition, often tacitly assumed rather than explicitly formulated.

The interpretation of Romans and of its commentaries will have to account for this element without impairing the essential gospel of Romans as the commentaries have helped to hand it down to us.

Some Methodological Prolegomena

Before we try to bring the various elements of Romans and its interpretation into one coherent structure, it may be useful and important to consider some of the statements that Thomas Aquinas makes in his commentary on the Epistle. They reflect and summarize the preceding

debates (particularly during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) on Christology (“Christological nihilianism”) and the interpretation of Scripture (“historical meaning”).

Rom 1:3 says about the Son of God that He “has become” (*factus est*), was born, out of David. This, Aquinas points out (quoting Mal 3:6: “I, God, do not change”), does not mean mutation but union, without change in God. He uses a simple human example to make his point. A person who was at the right-hand side can become to the left because someone else moves (with regard to whom that person was first said to be to the right). With regard to God, the point is that a statement that proclaims change can be true because of a change not in God but in man. This is the case when we call God Lord, or Creator, and also when we say that God has become man.⁸⁵

Still another element is mentioned in connection with the expression “designated Son of God” in Rom 1:4. Thomas here points out, criticizing Origen’s interpretation of this word, that it is customary in Scripture to say that something happened, viz., that it is a historical fact, when it becomes known.⁸⁶

To my knowledge, no one has ever accused Aquinas of docetism. However, any doubt in this respect may be removed by his emphatic rejection of such ideas, e.g., in his comment on Rom 8:3, where he ascribes this error to the Manichees.⁸⁷

We should keep these carefully formulated theological or hermeneutical (the emphasis may be on our speaking about God or on our interpretation of the Bible’s speaking about God) principles in mind while assembling the data that concern the right understanding of Romans, particularly of 1:18 ff.

The Argument of Romans

Paul’s gospel in Romans concerns the mystery of God’s incarnation (Theodoret of Cyrrhus), the mystery of God which is Christ (Ambrosiaster), the Word incarnate (Thomas Aquinas). God, i.e., God’s Word and Wisdom, created the world. God, in creating the world, revealed Himself. He became visible, audible, sensible to man, as cause in His effects, as the Word spoken to man, ubiquitous in His own creation. God, God’s Word, is close by, as close as man’s own mouth and heart. Some men acknowledge Him, acknowledging the effects and, in them,

⁸⁵ *Expositio in ep. ad Rom.* 1, lect. 2, p. 385a.

⁸⁶ “Secundum consuetudinem Scripturae, in qua dicitur aliquid fieri quando innotescit” (*ibid.* 1, lect. 3, p. 387b).

⁸⁷ “Non est sic intelligendum quasi veram carnem non habuerit, sed solum carnis similitudinem quasi phantasticam, sicut Manichaei dicunt” (*ibid.* 8, lect. 1, p. 485a-b).

their cause. Some do not. They abuse the effects and, in them, their cause. No one knows what God is, but everyone knows His visible and audible appearance. The appearance of the cause in its effects is not imaginary or "phantastic," but real. God's appearance "saves" and "redeems" man from his "God-less" existence, from "death," "darkness," "blindness," and "sin." Man's justice appears to have an infinite perspective, and so does his injustice; for in every effect its cause is present and close by. Therefore, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, between those who do and those who do not know *about* God. But there is an infinite difference between those who do and those who do not know, i.e., acknowledge, God, i.e., His effects wherein God is present. That knowledge is either "faith" or "unbelief," because it appears to have an infinite radius and perspective.

That is the mystery of God, of His incarnate Word and Wisdom, real since the creation of the world but "revealed" in God's due time.

Does the tradition faithfully reflect Paul's thoughts when it seems to claim "more" for Christians than for Jews and Gentiles? Paul never denied that the Jews had the advantage that God's law had been entrusted to them (Rom 3:2). Paul's entire effort is the interpretation of this law, and the ensuing claim that not those who hear but those who do the law will be justified (Rom 2:13), since God's justice has appeared outside the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it (Rom 3:21). That this witness (the law and the prophets interpreted) now bears the name "gospel" does not seem to affect Paul's statement.⁸⁸

Denial of the Incarnation?

We have chosen to formulate the argument of Romans in the terms of Romans and of the commentaries. We expect one main objection: the interpretation is formulated and understood so exclusively in terms of God's Word (Son, Wisdom, etc.) that there is no place for Jesus of Nazareth, for His birth, death, and resurrection. It would, then, seem a rather strange Christian gospel (or interpretation of Romans, for that matter) in which there is no room for Christ. Since the present article constitutes only a preliminary piece of research, we can hardly expect to touch all aspects of the problem. However, some answer to the objection mentioned is in order.

First, a counterstatement could be made to the effect that it would be a strange gospel indeed in which there would be no room for the Word

⁸⁸ Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are among the most outstanding representatives of the tradition that considers the written Gospel as the letter that kills. See Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* 1/2, q. 106, a. 2.

(the Son, the Wisdom) of God as emphasized in Romans and in the commentaries. In other words, we should avoid one-sided interpretations that neglect either the Word of God or Jesus of Nazareth.

The question, then, becomes: Does emphasis on the Word of God neglect Jesus, as the objection claims? My answer would be: it does not; for the entire sense and meaning of speaking, not simply about God, but about the Word and Wisdom of God, expresses essentially the speaking of God *to man*, also called creation, revelation, salvation, redemption, justification. The Word of God is the Word incarnate, i.e., it really equals Jesus, or Christ.

Are we playing with words, while substituting in fact an "eternal" incarnation for the one that took place in Jesus at a certain time and in a certain place? Again a counterquestion may be called for: Does the emphasis on the Jesus of history replace or exclude the incarnation (not eternal but) since the creation of the world (Rom 1:20)? However, as to the question itself, only an extremely careful and circumspect answer may be able to bring the seemingly disparate elements of Scripture into a coherent and consistent framework of understanding. Concerning "eternal" and "temporal" incarnation, the problem is not that anyone questions the *truth* of the statements involved, but we do question their compatibility and their intelligibility with respect to each other.

If we can agree that the statement "God has become" indicates a change in man and not in God (even though we do not and cannot see how the type of reality envisioned comes into being without change in God), then we may be closer to an understanding. If we can agree that it is the custom of Scripture to describe something as happening, i.e., as historical fact, when it becomes known, then we may be able to affirm the truth of historical and nonhistorical statements at the same time, without considering the latter as threatening or denying the former; for both proclaim the same mystery of God's incarnation.

IT IS THE SAME GOD

If Coffey wishes to find a middle way of interpreting Rom 1:18 ff. between Karl Barth's pure faith and Catholic theology's pure knowledge, he may well find the Greek and Latin commentators all on his side (in which case he may no longer be so sure about "the relatively simplistic exegetical methods of former times"⁹⁹). For, since the world is God's creation and self-revelation, man's knowledge (i.e., acknowledging) of effects does reach their cause, for better or for worse, i.e., in faith or unbelief. One may wonder if this is really so far from what Barth had in mind when he clung in every respect to Christ as the only mediator be-

⁹⁹ *Op. cit.* (n. 1 above) p. 691.

tween God and man. As far as Catholic theology is concerned, it has a tendency to stand by the tradition, although "Sentences" (sometimes believed to have been typical for medieval theology only) sometimes indulge in vagrancy like hippies who seem to have covered up their real identity.

At the basis of Coffey's "integration" of reason and faith one would find, with the same Greek and Latin tradition, that "it is the same God who appeared in Jesus Christ who reveals Himself also in the universe," i.e., the God who reveals Himself in the universe is called Jesus Christ.