

## THE COMMON GOOD IS PREFERABLE TO THE PRIVATE GOOD

these orders, the common good is more desirable than the private good. The common good will stand to the private as a whole to a part and thus will satisfy the appetite of that substance more completely. This truth transcends any particular science or any genus of being.

68. And even in God Himself, where there is neither any pursuit of the good nor any multiplication of appetites, the truth of this axiom can be found according to our faith in its *transcendent* principle. For His goodness is so complete that it must be perfectly communicated in order among three eternal Persons. Now God is in no way subject to axioms. Nor is His being the consequence of some other truth. Rather, the axioms that express the truth of created natures depend upon His uncreated truth. Here too in the order of the good: although we cannot see this now, it is because the notion of common good is found within God Himself, that in all creation the common good is preferable to the private good.

## A THOMISTIC DEFENSE OF THE TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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### Introduction:

Recently there has been a significant amount of research concerning the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Among the key elements under investigation is a more precise determination of the manner in which Christ can be said to be present in the Old Testament, or Hebrew, Scriptures. This article proposes to examine and apply the exegetical principles of St. Thomas Aquinas to this matter in light of recent studies.

While there are various modes of presence, in this article, we will restrict ourselves to one particular mode in which Christ can be said to be present in the Old Testament. Namely, we intend to address the question of whether Christ is signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense. This question, and the issues which it raises, pertain to various levels: philological, philosophical, apologetic and theological. And while we believe that significant progress towards determining an answer to this question can be made at these various levels, it is our contention that, the final resolution of this

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question belongs to the science of Theology. Briefly stated, the reason for this is because God is the principal author of the Scriptures. Therefore, the resolution of this question requires that we know the meaning expressed by the sacred authors *insofar as they were under the influence of divine inspiration*; and this can only be known through divine revelation.<sup>1</sup> And so, the ultimate answer to this question must be determined by a consideration of revelation as found, first of all, in the sacred Scriptures with sacred Tradition, as interpreted by the Magisterium.

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<sup>1</sup> We do not intend to exclude here the possibility of determining the intention of the sacred authors through "normal rules" of exegesis. In fact, the intention of the sacred authors can be readily gathered with sufficient certitude from the plain sense of the words in the great majority of texts in the Scriptures. Yet here we are dealing with a more particular problem: whether or not the sacred authors intended to signify Christ. This, of course, presupposes the possibility that the authors of the Old Testament had knowledge of future events and persons (which possibility could only be known through revelation). Therefore, for those who have faith in the divine inspiration of Scripture, it is clear that the rules of textual exegesis as applied to non-inspired works are not of themselves wholly sufficient for discovering the meaning of an inspired work. For additional principles of interpretation (principles which are properly theological) must be applied when we consider that the author of a work is God. Therefore, we should not be surprised if methods which do not take into account divine inspiration or revelation are not capable of discovering in the texts of Scripture everything which the sacred authors intended to signify. Some might hold that such an approach is not truly "critical," and leaves the results of such an investigation inaccessible to non-believers. To such an objection, I respond with the words of J. Pieper in his essay on Faith: "Those who accept nothing as true and valid that has not withstood their own exacting investigation are generally regarded as critical observers. But what about the person who, fearing that by such a procedure he may overlook the whole truth, prefers to accept less complete certainty rather than incur a possible loss of contact with reality? Can he not also be claiming to be thinking critically?" It seems that even the critical non-believer should be open, therefore, to such a method of interpretation.

## The Senses of Scripture:

In order to understand more distinctly the question we are asking, we must first determine what is meant by the literal sense of Scripture, and distinguish it from other senses of Scripture. Among exegetes, there does not seem to be absolute unanimity as to what is meant by the literal sense of Scripture. If, then, we are to determine whether or not Christ is signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense, we must be clear about the meaning of "literal sense".

In order to do this, we do well to recognize that there is a certain ambiguity and latitude in the use of words; we should not deny that a given word or expression can have a legitimate plurality of accepted meanings. We know from experience that the same word or expression has sometimes several (usually related) accepted meanings. Since, as Aristotle observes, common usage determines the meanings of words,<sup>2</sup> if a common usage admits several meanings, then the words so used has from the beginning many meanings. Such is it with the expression "literal sense" as applied to Scripture. Yet even if this legitimate plurality be admitted, there is not an unlimited range of meaning for any word or expression. Most words, even allowing for some plurality of meaning, fall within a circumscribed range of meaning. This range of meaning is restricted even more if there is a particular application of the word or expression. Thus, for example, it is one thing to investigate the meaning of the word "table" without a specified context; it is quite another to determine its meaning in the context of the art of furniture manufacturing or book editing: in the former we might signify a dinner table, in the latter a table of contents. Since we are seeking to understand the meaning of the expression "literal sense of Scripture" in the context of the art of scriptural exegesis (i.e., the art of

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<sup>2</sup> *Topics* Bk. II.

determining the meaning of scriptural passages), that context will from the beginning focus our efforts.

First we shall consider the notion of literal sense from common usage. Then, we shall consider some definitions of the literal sense of Scripture as proposed by various authoritative sources. Finally, we shall consider if the meaning of this expression is restricted by the context in which we are considering it.

According to common usage, the literal sense of any passage is the meaning of the words. In most cases, this vague notion of "literal sense" is sufficient; but in some cases, it does not suffice. For example, when words are used metaphorically what should be called the literal sense? When we speak of "God's right hand" how should this be understood? Is the literal sense the sense of the words as one would find them in a dictionary, or the sense of the words as intended by the author? Words live a kind of dual existence. On the one hand, they take their meaning from the one who speaks or writes them. Yet on the other hand, they exist within a pre-established context. Words are not only expressions of the mind of the one who says them; they are also signs to those who apprehend them. For a word to serve its purpose, there must be some conventional context: a mutual agreement about words. Those meanings of words do not depend upon the author alone: he must abide by the conventions of the language in which he signifies.

Consequently, whenever the conventions of a language used by an author are significantly different from the conventions of the language of one apprehending the words of the author, the possibility of significant misunderstandings arises. This may happen, for example, when translating a text from one language to another, or when a text is written in a place or time far removed from the place or time of one seeking to understand the text. Thus, special difficulties arise about the literal sense of a passage written within the linguistic conventions of another language or time or place. Again,

when the same words are placed within a new linguistic convention, when they are imbedded within a new context, this can result in new possible interpretations.<sup>3</sup> Can these new interpretations be called their literal sense?

It is obvious that where sacred Scripture is concerned, these difficulties especially apply. For not only are the Scriptures often couched in highly figurative terms; they were also written in ancient languages at a time and in a culture far removed from the present. Besides all of these difficulties, these Scriptures were written under the inspiration of God, and so a certain mysterious element is found therein which is not found in other texts.

From these considerations it is clear that we will have to refine our concept of the expression "literal sense" if we are to make some headway into resolving the question of whether Christ is signified literally in the Old Testament.

#### St. Thomas Aquinas and the Literal Sense of Scripture:

St. Thomas Aquinas is the exponent *par excellence* of traditional Catholic teaching concerning the literal sense of Scripture. Therefore, we will first consider the meaning of this expression as he understands it. Then we shall add the precisions of other recent and authoritative definitions.

St. Thomas discusses the notion of the literal sense of Scripture in the *Summa Theologica*, Ia, Q. 1, a. 10. The context of this discussion is a general introduction to Theology. St. Thomas holds that the Scriptures as inspired by God contain multiple levels of signification which cannot be found in any other written text.<sup>4</sup> Observing that it is within the power of God to signify not only by words, but also by things and events, St. Thomas distinguished two ways in which that which is asserted in the Scriptures has a meaning. That first signification,

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (P.B.C.), *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, II, B. 1, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Quaest. Quodl.* VI, Q. 6, a. 3.

by which a word signifies a thing, is the literal sense of Scripture. The secondary signification, by which a thing, already signified by a word in turn signifies another thing, pertains to the spiritual sense of Scripture. This spiritual sense can only belong to an inspired text, since God alone, as the Lord of history, can cause actual things and historical events to signify or foreshadow something else. Thus, for St. Thomas, the possibility that a passage of Scripture can contain multiple senses is founded wholly upon the power of God; it is beyond the capabilities of human authorship.<sup>5</sup>

St. Thomas goes on to argue that the literal sense of the Scripture is the sense which the author first intends. This does not mean that God or the human author do not intend a spiritual sense. It means rather that God (together with the human author) intends first that the words signify an object and, depending upon that signification, that the signified object is itself a sign of something further. Thus, any spiritual sense depends upon the literal sense, since without it the spiritual sense cannot even exist. For how can one determine accurately what a thing signifies according to the Scriptures if one is not even sure if that thing itself is signified by the words?

It should be carefully noted that, for St. Thomas, scriptural exegesis is distinct from determining the scriptural principles of Theology. By "scriptural principles of Theology", I mean the first premises of a demonstrative argument in the science of Theology. Not all the results of exegesis are useful for constructing demonstrative theological arguments. Yet, while it is true that theological arguments can only be constructed from the literal sense of Scripture, it does not follow from this that exegesis which determines the spiritual sense does not attain to a valid interpretation. Thus, in *De Potentia* 4, a. 1, *corpus*, St. Thomas says "Every truth that can be adapted to the sacred Text without prejudice to the literal sense is the sense of Holy Scripture."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, II, B, p. 78.

At this point it is important to distinguish different forms in which the literal sense of a passage might be expressed. Sometimes the literal sense of a passage is stated plainly, but sometimes it is stated using certain figures of speech, such as metaphor, parable, hyperbole, simile, etc. All these are part of the literal sense, and so St. Thomas can say that: "the parabolic sense is contained under the literal: for through words one thing is signified properly, and another thing figuratively, nor is the literal sense the figure itself, but that which is figured."<sup>6</sup> Since the literal sense can be communicated under figures, it follows that, in certain cases, the literal sense of a passage may not be obvious to all who read it. Thus it is essential not to confuse the literal sense of a passage with the sense which is plainly stated, or the sense which most people would understand by a passage. *The literal sense is the sense which the author intends to communicate by his words, whether or not this sense is easily understood by all or most who read those words.*

Hence there arises an ambiguity if one defines the literal sense as "the sense expressed directly by the words," or "the sense expressed directly by the author." Often, what one intends to say is quite different from what people understand by the words, or what seems to be expressed by the words. In fact, the Scriptures themselves often testify to the fact that sometimes the meaning intended by the author is intentionally obscured by the use of figures. In the first place, our Lord Himself spoke to the crowds in parables (Mk. 4:34). Some of these parables were understood well by those to whom they were addressed (cf. Mk. 12:12, Mt. 21:45), while others were only imperfectly understood. In the Old Testament, the prophets intentionally veiled their language in figures (for example, see Num. 12:8; Is. 6:9; Ez. 21:5 & 24:3; and Ps. 78:2). We read in Isaiah 8:16 that Isaiah, like Jesus, revealed the sense of some of these prophecies to his disciples: "I bind up the testimony, I seal this revelation in the heart of my disciples."

<sup>6</sup> *Summa Theologica* (hereafter, S.T.), Ia, Q. 1, a. 10, ad 3.

Again, in Daniel 12:4 we read: "But you, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time appointed."

According to St. Thomas, one reason why certain teachings are veiled in figures is to proportion the truths contained therein to even the simple.<sup>7</sup> Another reason is to obscure these truths from the unworthy.<sup>8</sup> In his commentary on Isaiah, chapter 6, St. Thomas says:

"Those things which the prophets see plainly without figures, they set down in figures for the sake of leading the hearers by the hand, who are able to accept them through sensible figures more easily. However this may be, it is necessary to see two things here. First, the imagination of the figure, either seen by the prophet or composed by him. Second, the signification of the figure itself. For sensible figures of spiritual things are introduced into the sacred Scriptures for the sake of signifying something spiritually, just as Dionysius says. And that will be the literal sense, just as in metaphorical speech not that which is signified by the words, but what the one speaking wills to signify through the words [is the literal sense]."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> By way of a simple illustration, take any number of scriptural passages which assert that God is angry or regretful towards His creatures. These assertions involve the use of figurative language since God does not have a body or emotions. If, rather than offering these brief descriptions of God's condition, these texts made all the theological precisions necessary to indicate distinctly what is and what is not being asserted about God, they would be exceedingly lengthy and obscure to uneducated people. On the other hand, by means of these simple figures even the simple can grasp some part of the truth about God. See, *inter alia*, S.T. Ia, Q. 1, a. 9, corpus; and IIIa, Q. 60, a. 4, corpus.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S.T., Ia, Q. 1, a. 9; and *Super Ev. Matt.* XII, (n. 1082 in Marietti).

<sup>9</sup> *Super Isaiam*, cap. 6: "Quod prophetae his quae plane vident sine figuris, circumponuntur figurae ad manuductionem audientium, qui per figuras sensibiles facilius accipere possunt. Qualitercumque autem sit, oportet hic duo videre. Primo imaginationem figurae, vel a propheta visa, vel ad ipso composita; et secundo ipsius figurae significationem: ad aliquid enim significandum spiritualiter, inducuntur sensibiles figurae spiritualium in sacra scriptura, sicut dicit Dionysius. Et ille erit literalis sensus; sicut etiam in locutionibus metaphoricis non illud quod significatur per verba, sed quod loquens per verba vult significare."

In summary, according to St. Thomas, the literal sense of a scriptural passage is a meaning which the sacred author intends to signify immediately by his words and in fact expresses. However, this does not demand that his intended meaning was expressed openly, since often it was veiled under obscure figures, yet expressed in such a way that those who employ the proper principles of interpretation may correctly gather their meaning.

#### Other Possible Meanings of "Literal Sense"

At this point we must distinguish various possible meanings of "the literal sense" of Scripture. Definitions of the literal sense of a Scriptural text are found both in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and in the 1993 Pontifical Biblical Commission (P.B.C.) document. The Catechism states in n. 116:

The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation.

The 1993 P.B.C. document defines the literal sense as follows:

The literal sense of Scripture is that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors.<sup>10</sup>

Both of these definitions are compatible with the definition given by St. Thomas, although each might be interpreted in a way which is not covered by the definition of St. Thomas. The definition given in the Catechism explicitly mentions that the literal sense is conveyed by words, but does not mention the human author. On the other hand, the definition given in the 1993 P.B.C. document does not explicitly mention that the meaning is expressed through words. Neither definition explicitly mentions that the literal sense is the meaning intended by the sacred human author. We note, however, that the definition given in the Catechism ought to be read in the background of *Dei Verbum*, where it is said: "the exegete must look for that meaning which the sacred writer, in a

<sup>10</sup> *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 79.

determined situation and given the circumstances of his time and culture, intended to express and did in fact express.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, it is reasonable to interpret the addendum “discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation,” to be a reference to the expressed intention of the sacred author.

Here we must return to the point we made above that, as regards the definition of terms, it is possible to allow for a plurality of definitions of the same word or expression. What we intend to accomplish here is to arrive at the most proper meaning of the expression “literal sense,” especially as it is used in the context of textual exegesis and, more particularly, Scriptural exegesis. The question at hand is: what is the most proper meaning of the expression “literal sense?” Is it the meaning intended by the author; or is it more properly the sense likely to be understood by the reader according to the linguistic conventions in which the text is placed? There are a number of reasons which indicate that the most proper meaning of the expression “literal sense” must include reference to the intention of the author.

First, an understanding of the literal sense which is not essentially dependent upon the intention of the author results in arbitrary interpretations. For which people ought to be taken as the judge of the meaning of these passages? Only faithful Jews, or unfaithful ones as well? Perhaps the disciples of a particular prophet understood one thing, while the common people understood something else (as we have shown to be the case already). Whose interpretation should take precedence? Again, if the great majority of listeners understood the opening chapters of Genesis, for example, to signify that there were seven twenty-four-hour days of creation, should this be taken as the literal sense of sacred Scripture? Would this not result in the position that the literal sense of Scripture is false?

Secondly, any definition of the literal sense which divorces

<sup>11</sup> *Dei Verbum*, ch. 3.

this sense from what the author intended to communicate renders such texts unintelligible. Words may signify by convention, but the one who speaks them must also intend to abide by that convention.<sup>12</sup> If an Italian speaker says “si” in a group of English speakers who hear “see,” he may be understood to signify something according to the conventions of English, but this is certainly not the meaning of his word.

Besides these difficulties, there is a third problem. If the text written by a sacred author has a new meaning conferred upon it by placing it into a new context, how can the sacred author be called the true author of what is asserted in that text except in a purely material way?<sup>13</sup>

From these considerations, it is manifest that the intention of the author is essential to a proper understanding of the expression “literal sense.” Yet we ought to also admit that the expression of the author’s intention is also an integral component of a proper definition of “literal sense.” Otherwise, the words themselves would be unnecessary. It appears that Pius XII was aware of the difficulties which arise from separating the intention of the author from the verbal expression which he used to communicate his intended meaning, for in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* he indicated that the exegete is to determine the “significance of the words which the sacred writer intended and expressed.”<sup>14</sup> This definition has the advantage of uniting both aspects of the notion of the “literal sense.” It is also in keeping with the definition of St. Thomas (allowing still for modes of expression in which the author’s intention might not always be readily or easily gathered from the words themselves). This is the definition of the literal sense which we shall adopt here.

At this point, a further question might be asked: can the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. S.T., IIIa, Q. 60, a. 5, ad 1.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Bolin, David, “On the Inerrancy of Scripture,” in *The Aquinas Review*, 8, no. 1, (2001), 110.

<sup>14</sup> *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, AAS 35 (1943), 310.

literal sense of a passage be validly defined as that sense which is most readily understood according to the linguistic conventions in which the text is situated? Here it is no longer a matter of a more proper or less proper meaning, but rather of a *valid* meaning. The question becomes more complicated when we ask it in the context of Scriptural exegesis: for, in this context, there is both a human and divine author. In principle, the intentions of the dual authors of Scripture could be diverse or at least distinguished. Therefore, to address this question fully, it will be necessary to consider the nature of biblical inspiration and the precise relationship between the human and divine authors of Scripture. We shall address this question at the appropriate place below. It is enough to see here that the most proper meaning of the expression "literal sense" ought to include reference both to the intention of the author and the expression by which he communicates his intention. With this understanding of the literal sense of Scripture, let us pass on to consider whether Christ is signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense.

### I. Dialectical Consideration of the Matter

#### Arguments that Christ Was not Signified in the Old Testament According to the Literal Sense:

There are a number of reasons why one would hold the position that Christ is not signified in the Old Testament according to its literal sense. We shall briefly summarize the principal reasons here, and then take them up in greater detail below. First, the data of Revelation can be explained better if we suppose that the Old Testament authors did not know explicitly of Christ. This is so for two reasons: 1) because the words of the Old Testament do not clearly signify Christ; and 2) because all the words of the Old Testament already refer to things or events contemporary with the sacred author and, therefore, not to Christ. Second, it does violence to the proper

notion of sacred history to think that the ancient prophets, separated so far from Christ in time and culture, could conceive of Christ and express this in a way which would be meaningful for their contemporaries. Third, the very nature of biblical prophecy requires that it be capable of constant reinterpretation, which could not happen in a fixed schema of clear and successful predictions. Finally, the Magisterium of the Church teaches that Christ was not signified according to the literal sense.

#### *A. The Words of the Old Testament do not Clearly Signify Christ:*

Referring to a number of Old Testament passages which seemed to relate to Christ, St. Paul said in his first epistle to the Corinthians: "All these things happened to them in figure."<sup>15</sup> Thus, the concept that Christ was present in the Old Testament, but only in figure, or under veiled terms, has a strong foundation in the teaching of the New Testament itself. Now one ought not to posit an interpretation of a text when the text itself does not clearly signify the posited interpretation. Therefore, it seems that we should not assert that Christ is signified according to the literal sense of any passage of the Old Testament. For example, we read in one contemporary author: "Because of the way in which people have thought of the inspiration of scripture, they have attempted to rediscover in the prophet's consciousness a clear and definite perception of very distant events. Now nothing is less certain than that the prophets had such a consciousness."<sup>16</sup>

While there is much to say for the position that wherever a so-called prophecy of Christ is found in the Old Testament, it is there in veiled terms and, therefore, can only be discovered by faith, this position is not self-evident. In fact, even at

<sup>15</sup> I Cor. 10:11.

<sup>16</sup> Prevost, J. P., *How to Read the Prophets*, London, SCM, (1996), 22.

face value, a number of Old Testament texts seem to refer to Christ in surprisingly clear terms.

Let us examine a few examples. As we read in Matthew 2:1-6, when Herod sought to know the birthplace of the Messiah, the scribes were able to accurately inform him that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. They discovered this from the text of the prophet Micah which reads "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." The prophet goes on to say that "his greatness shall reach the ends of the earth."<sup>17</sup> So well known was this prophecy among the Jews that they use it as evidence that Jesus was not the Messiah, since they mistakenly thought that He was born in Galilee.<sup>18</sup> Here we have a prophecy clear and accessible even to those who do not already have faith in Jesus. The substance of the prophecy is simply this: a great ruler will be born in Bethlehem, whose fame will reach the ends of the earth. In the history of the world, from the time of the prophet Micah until now, has there ever been another man besides Jesus Christ who fits this description?

Psalm 22 (21) is another excellent example. There we read about a man who is suffering great torments and being persecuted by his enemies. They ridicule him saying "He relied upon Yahweh, let Yahweh save him; let Him deliver him since He delights in him." The torture which they inflict upon him is described saying that "they have dug holes in my hands and my feet, I can count all my bones." Even the actions of the bystanders are described: "these people stare at me and gloat. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my robe." Now, with the execution of Jesus having passed, a historically verifiable fact, accessible even to those without faith, we see a man who is suffering, mocked in nearly the same

<sup>17</sup> Micah 5:1-5.

<sup>18</sup> Jn. 7:42.

words as in this Psalm. His hands and feet are pierced by blunt nails. His bones are disjointed by crucifixion so that they are numerable (i.e., can be distinguished one from another). Even his garments are divided and over the single robe he wore soldiers cast lots. Perhaps before these events befell Jesus, one could hold that this Psalm was not necessarily a prophecy. But now that these words are fulfilled in such exacting detail, what other option remains? Unless one were simply to assert (and this is all it could be, an assertion) that the account of the Evangelists was a revised or doctored version of what actually happened, fabricated to fit the words of the Psalm (and it is hard to see how this would not be a lie), it seems that there can be no room for doubt that this Psalm could only apply to the man Jesus.

Other examples could be cited, such as Daniel 9:20-27; Isaiah 53; Psalm 72 (71), *etc.*, each of which has been taken in the Catholic tradition as being a relatively clear prophecy of the Christ. Our contention here is not that there are not difficulties which could be raised concerning each of these citations, but rather that it is not at all obvious that the Old Testament is lacking passages which openly refer to Christ. On the face of it, in light of the above examples, such a position seems implausible. Nevertheless, let us acknowledge that there are substantial difficulties with holding that the sacred authors intended to signify Christ by their words in the Old Testament.

In order to resolve this difficulty, a number of distinctions must be made. First of all, as was shown above, it often happens in sacred Scripture that the sacred author intentionally veiled his language. This is not mere speculation, but is attested to by the Scriptures in numerous places. As we also noted above, there were many reasons for this: so that the simple might be led to grasp more easily some part of this revelation and so that the mysteries of faith would be hidden from the impious. St. Augustine adds yet another reason: namely, so that the student of Scripture might not hold such



knowledge to be cheap, since those things which we come by easily are considered to be of less worth.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, even if there were no clear references to Christ in the Old Testament, this would not, by itself, exclude the possibility that He was signified according to the literal sense of such veiled passages.

Nevertheless, as the above-cited examples testify, in addition to the references to Christ which are hidden under figures, there are also sufficiently clear references to Christ in the Old Testament. Commenting upon John 5:39, St. Thomas notes: "For the faith of Christ was contained in the Old Testament, but not on the surface, since it was hidden in the deep by means of darkened figure."<sup>20</sup> But in the same passage St. Thomas goes on to mention that sometimes the Scriptures testified to Christ with "open prophecies."<sup>21</sup>

Here, again, a distinction needs to be made. It is one thing to say that a passage is clear at the time in which it was written, and another to say that it became clear at some later time.<sup>22</sup> Many of the passages which speak openly of Christ are not so perfectly distinct that, beforehand, it would have been obvious to those reading it that they referred to the Christ, the Messiah who was to come.<sup>23</sup> As the saying goes, hindsight is 20/20. The question is: what exactly about the passage of time has rendered the meaning of a prophetic passage clear? In the case of at least some of the prophecies about Christ, it

<sup>19</sup> *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Super Joannem*, cap. V, sec. X, (n. 823 in Marietti): "Nam fides Christi in Veteri Testamento continebatur, sed non in superficie, quia in profundo obumbrata figura latebat."

<sup>21</sup> Such as Is. 7:14 and Deut. 18:15; see also *Super Ev. Matt. Cap. XXVI*, lect. VI, (n. 2264 in Marietti).

<sup>22</sup> The Old Testament prophets themselves testify to the fact that certain prophecies become manifest by the passage of time as, for example, Jer. 23:20, Ez. 33:33 and Dan. 12:9-10.

<sup>23</sup> Of the cases which seem to have been well understood even before Christ's coming we may cite, for example, Mich. 5:1-5 which we treated above and Deut. 18:15.

is the very fact that the historical events of Christ's life conformed so perfectly to the prophecies that made it clear that Jesus was the one signified by these prophecies.<sup>24</sup> In other cases, the perspective of faith was also necessary to render such passages more clear so that they could be seen to refer to Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

A second observation also needs to be made here. Often it happens that a prophetic passage is a mixture of clear and unclear or figurative expressions. Thus, there can be some difficulty in seeing exactly how the whole of a passage could be understood to refer to Christ. Thus, St. Augustine says:

Though there may be literal (*propriae*) and clear prophetic statements on any subject, allegorical statements are inevitably intermingled with them, and it is those especially

<sup>24</sup> Some examples of this are Psalm 21 (22) and Isa. 53. Concerning Isa. 53, for example, the Catechism of Trent, paraphrasing St. Jerome, said: "the oracles of Isaiah in particular are so clear and graphic that he might be said rather to have recorded a past than predicted a future event." (Cf. St. Jerome's Epistle 53 *ad Paulinus*). In such cases, faith in the strict sense, is not necessary to see Christ as the fulfillment of these passages. Consider the passage from the Acts of the Apostles where the deacon Philip meets the eunuch as he reads Isa. 53: "And the eunuch said to Philip, 'About whom, pray, does the prophet say (*legei*) this, about himself or someone else?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news of Jesus." There are a number of elements which should be noticed here. First of all, there was something in the text itself which led the eunuch to suspect that the prophet may not have been speaking about himself, but about another. Thus Philip begins from that text of Scripture to preach about Jesus. Observe also that faith came at the end, not at the beginning of this process. The eunuch had the disposition for faith, but did not yet have faith itself. Nevertheless, he was able to find evidence in the text for the faith which Philip preached. In order to find evidence of Christ in the Old Testament, faith is not a prerequisite, but rather a certain docility which disposes one for faith.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Isa. 9:6-7: to see this as a prophecy of Christ, one would have to accept beforehand His divinity and everlasting reign through faith.

that force upon scholars the laborious business of discussion and exposition for the benefit of the more slow witted.<sup>26</sup>

He applies this principle to the exposition of Psalm 21 (22) as follows:

We find the same thing in the Psalm where Christ in a prophecy gives an eloquent description of the humiliation of his passion, in these words: *they have pierced my hands and my feet. . . .* Then there are other sayings in this Psalm which are less explicit in their reference; but there can be no question that they are rightly taken when the interpretation is consistent with the passages where the meaning is patent and so luminously clear.<sup>27</sup>

In summary, a number of Old Testament texts do openly refer to Christ, though in a great many cases this becomes clear after the deeds predicted come to pass. Besides this, often these open prophecies are intermingled with obscure texts as well, so that some labor is necessary on the part of the expositor to render these parts intelligible as well. Furthermore, while it seems that the great majority of prophetic texts which refer to Christ are hidden under figures, this does not mean that they cannot be intended to refer to Christ by the sacred author.

*B. The So-Called Prophecies about Christ  
All Refer to Contemporary Events:*

Another objection to the position that the Old Testament authors intended to signify Christ is that in every place where a so-called prophecy of Christ is made, it can be shown that the same text referred, in fact, to a historical event or figure contemporary with the prophet. For example, Fr. Raymond Brown says:

<sup>26</sup> *The City of God*, Bk. 17, ch. 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 17. For a brilliant instance of this see St. Thomas' exposition of Psalm 21.

The Old Testament authors did not foresee in detail the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Those who are called OT prophets were concerned with their own times and not with the distant future about which they could speak only in the vaguest way. Therefore, whether they know it or not, when the NT authors see prophecy fulfilled in Jesus, they are going beyond the vision of the OT authors.<sup>28</sup>

Another notable scholar says: "These prophecies [Num. 24:17 & Gen. 49:10] found their fulfillment in the early monarchical period, and it is only by ignoring that original setting that they can continue to function as prophecies for the future."<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps even more significant is a fundamental principle of biblical interpretation set forth by a 2002 Pontifical Biblical Commission (P.B.C.) document: "All the texts, including those which were later read as messianic prophecies, already had an immediate import and meaning for their contemporaries. . . ." <sup>30</sup> At first, this would seem to imply that no prophecy was originally intended to be about the future, but was more concerned with the present. But is "to have an immediate import and meaning for their contemporaries" the same thing as saying that these passages were not intended to refer to someone or something in the future? Certainly not. The foretelling of future blessings was for ancient Israel a constant source of hope amidst trials. Nothing could have greater import for the contemporaries of Ezechiel or Jeremiah than a promise of future liberation from servitude and exile. It was *present* hope in future blessings which kept the Jewish people united and alive amidst such trials. Were there not among the people Israel some who also longed for salvation from death and sin? Were they not men like us, faced with the fear

<sup>28</sup> Brown, R., *The Virginal Conception & Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, New York, Paulist Press, 1973, 15.

<sup>29</sup> J. J. M. Roberts, *The Messiah*, London, SCM, 1996, 41.

<sup>30</sup> *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, P.B.C., II, A. 5, p. 48.

of death, constantly aware of their weaknesses and offenses, their incapacity to serve and love God as much as they ought? Therefore, we should not hastily conclude that promises of a Messiah who would establish everlasting peace, who would deliver from more than material misfortune, would not have had an immediate import and meaning for their contemporaries.

In order to establish the claim that all of the so-called prophecies of Christ actually referred to something else, it would be necessary to take up each of the innumerable instances one-by-one. On the other hand, to show the contrary, it would be sufficient to manifest one or more cases where this is not the case. Above, where we considered the passages from Micah and Psalm 21 (22), we saw that there seems to be no one who fits the description of the person signified save Jesus Christ. Let us cite other examples: 2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Chron. 17:12; Ps. 2:7-8; Ps. 72; Ps. 89; Isa. 8:8-10; Isa. 9:5-6; Ez. 37:25; and Dan. 7:13-14 all describe someone who shall be a great ruler, and whose reign will be universal and/or everlasting.<sup>31</sup> To whom could such prophecies refer? Certainly not a mere man. We are left with two possibilities: either they refer to someone who is more than a mere man, or they are all to be understood hyperbolically.

But there are problems with asserting that these prophecies were intended hyperbolically. First of all, this can only be an assertion or hypothesis. Can it be said with certitude that the prophets didn't intend to speak properly when they spoke of this everlasting and universal ruler? Considering the divine origin of the Scriptures, is not such a revelation possible? Moreover, there are no clear contextual indications which demand an hyperbolic interpretation of these texts. Besides, if

<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, in some of the above-cited passages (e.g., the texts from 2 Sam. & 1 Chr.) there is ambiguity as to whether an individual or a dynasty is referred to. Yet when these texts are all considered together, they give an integral witness of a constant prophetic tradition which refers to an individual and not simply a dynasty.

these texts were meant to be understood hyperbolically, then what kind of a solution would this so-called Messiah provide except a temporary solution; and then what kind of Messiah would he be? The hopes of Israel were everlasting, as were the promises made to them. If the prophets spoke of just another leader who would come and leave with Israel no better off after he is gone than before he came, how could this respond to the deepest hopes of Israel?<sup>32</sup>

There is yet another difficulty with interpreting such passages as mere hyperbole. For there is strong evidence that such texts were not taken as hyperbole by the Jews of Jesus' time. For example, in the twelfth chapter of John, after Jesus speaks to the crowds about His impending death, the Jews in the crowd object "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever, how can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?"<sup>33</sup> This would hardly be a serious objection if the Jews had taken the Old Testament texts about the everlasting kingdom of the Christ as hyperbole. The superhuman qualities of the expected Messiah were known even to a simple Samaritan woman: "when the Messiah comes, he will teach us all things."<sup>34</sup> Besides that which is written in the Gospel of John, there is ample evidence in non-biblical texts that many Jews before and during the time of Christ had understood these prophecies to refer to a Messiah who was more than a mere man.

Christian exegetes must confront a further difficulty with

<sup>32</sup> We acknowledge here that there was not consensus among the people of Israel as to what the nature of these everlasting promises and hopes would be. Certainly, some thought that these promises would be fulfilled in this world in a carnal way, so that the messiahship of Jesus was not anticipated in its fullness or transcendency: "My kingdom is not of this world," (Jn. 18:36). Moreover, the integration of the notion of the suffering servant with the notion of the Messiah was something which even Jesus' closest disciples did not seem to understand until after the Resurrection.

<sup>33</sup> Jn. 12:34.

<sup>34</sup> Jn. 4:25.

the assertion that these passages were intended hyperbolically. Christians believe that someone who was not a mere man did come to establish an eternal and universal reign: the man Jesus Christ. Does it seem reasonable to assert that so many prophets spoke so clearly about this eternal and universal reign which, as a matter of fact, came to pass and yet all along they had not meant to predict what turned out to be the case? Is it reasonable to suppose that although God had intended from all eternity to send His Only Son into the world, when He spoke through the prophets, even foretelling certain future events through them, He failed to inform any of them about the most significant future event He would bring about? Against this we read in Amos: "Surely, the Lord God does nothing without revealing His secret to his servants the prophets."<sup>35</sup> Doesn't it seem more reasonable that if some extraordinary person or event of salvation history has come, and that there are myriad passages in the Old Testament which, at face value, refer to just such an event, then we should accept these as true prophecies not simply accommodations? Is it reasonable to assert that, in spite of the divine light vouchsafed to the minds of the prophets, these could not have been intended to refer to Christ?

In short, there is sufficient reason to believe that the sacred authors of the Old Testament consciously intended to signify a future ruler whose kingdom would be universal and would never end. But if this is so, what historical figure could they have been referring to? Would not this person have to be the man whom Christians believe Jesus to be?

From the above we see that there are serious difficulties with the position that every prophecy which is supposed to refer to Jesus Christ in fact refers, in its literal sense, to something or someone other than Jesus Christ. On the other hand, we recognize that in many cases the texts which are supposed to refer to Christ do seem to refer also to contemporary per-

<sup>35</sup> Amos 3:7.

sons or events. Thus, a well respected scholar points out: "It is established beyond question that the imagery and titles accorded to the Messiah were drawn from earlier titles applied to the reigning king of Israel. It also was able to show, at least in substantial measure, that most of the passages in psalmody and prophecy which had been taken by later Jews and Christians as foretellings of the Messiah's coming were either directly addressed to the reigning king of Israel or were assurances concerning the restoration of such a monarchy after its collapse in 587 B.C."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, certain distinctions remain to be made which may help in determining how Christ might be signified in those passages which do not refer to Him as clearly. St. Thomas makes a number of helpful distinctions in his exegetical works which aid us in this regard:

since not only the words of the Old Testament, but even the deeds signify Christ, sometimes certain things are said literally about someone else, but are referred to Christ, insofar as they bear the figure of Christ, just as it is said about Solomon *And he shall rule from sea to sea*, etc. (Ps. 72:8); for this was not fulfilled in him [i.e., Solomon].<sup>37</sup>

Here St. Thomas is recalling a fundamental principle of Scriptural interpretation found in Ia, Q. 1, a. 10. Namely, since God is the author not only of Scripture, but of salvation history, He is capable of using not only words, but even things and events as signs. Thus, it is not an either/or position to say that a prophecy refers to some historical person or event other than

<sup>36</sup> Clements, R., *Old Testament Prophecy: from Oracles to Canon*, Louisville, Westminster, 1996, 55. Cf. Engnell, I., *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East*, (2nd ed.), Oxford, Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> *Super Ev. S. Matt.* cap. I, sec. V, (n. 148 in Marietti): "Sed quia non solum verba Veteris Testamenti, sed etiam facta significant de Christo, aliquando dicuntur aliqua ad litteram de aliquibus aliis, sed referuntur ad Christum, in quantum illa gerunt figuram Christi, sicut de Salomone dicitur *Et dominabitur a mari usque ad mare*, etc. (Ps. 71:8); hoc enim non fuit impletum in eo."

Christ, and that the same prophecy refers to Christ as well. It is possible that the sacred author was illuminated by the Holy Spirit so that he could discern in the events of history things which God intended to use as signs of Christ. And thus, the intention of the sacred author could be to signify Christ through words which signify contemporary or future historical events, such as the reign of Solomon. St. Thomas refines this distinction further by noting that, in some of these cases, the author is primarily interested in signifying Christ:

However, prophecy is sometimes said about things which were of that time, but were not said principally about them, but insofar as they are a figure of future things. And therefore, the Holy Spirit ordains that when such things are said, certain things are inserted which exceed the condition of that thing which is carried out, so that the soul might be elevated to a figure. Just as in Daniel many things are said about Antiochus in figure of the Antichrist: hence, there certain things are read which are not brought to completion in him, however they will be fulfilled in the Antichrist. Just as also some things are read about the reign of David and Solomon which were not fulfilled in the reign of these men, but would be fulfilled in the reign of Christ, in whose figure they are said: as in Ps. 72, *God, [give to the king Thy] judgement*, etc., which is, according to the title, about the reign of David and Solomon, but [there is] something placed in it which exceeds the capacity of it, namely *there will arise in his days justice and abundance of peace until the moon is borne away*; and again, *He shall rule from sea to sea and from the river to the ends [of the earth]*. Therefore, this Psalm is expounded about the reign of Solomon insofar as it is a figure of the reign of Christ in which all the things said there will be completed.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Super Psalmos David*, Prooemium: "Prophetiae autem aliquando dicuntur de rebus quae tunc temporis erant, sed non principaliter dicuntur de eis, sed in quantum figura sunt futurorum. Et ideo Spiritus Sanctus ordinavit quod quando talia dicuntur, inserantur quaedam quae excedunt conditionem illius rei gestae, ut animus elevatur ad figuratum. Sicut in

Thus, St. Thomas distinguishes two ways in which a text might be taken to refer to Christ. Sometimes, a prophecy refers only to Christ, and not to some current event or person. Sometimes a prophecy refers in its literal sense to some historical event or person at or near the time in which the prophecy was made, yet is said of it principally insofar as it is a figure of Christ. St. Thomas borrows from Sts. Jerome and Augustine the principle that we are made aware that the primary fulfillment of such a text is found in Christ whenever things are said which exceed the conditions of those to whom the literal sense refers.<sup>39</sup> According to St. Thomas, there is yet a third way in which a text might be referred to Christ. Commenting upon the passage in St. Matthew's Gospel where the Evangelist speaks of the fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 in the return of Jesus from Egypt, St. Thomas says:

There seems to be a question here: for this does not appear to accomplish the thing proposed, since there (Hos. 11:1) [*When*] *Israel [was] a child*, is placed before, and thus [the prophet] appears to speak about the calling of Israel out of Egypt. But it ought to be said that in all authorities which are set down about Christ either in the Gospels or the Epistles, a certain distinction ought to be noted: for certain ones are said particularly about Christ, just as that one *As a sheep he was led to the slaughter* (Isa. 53:7); certain others, however,

Daniele multa dicuntur de Anthioco in figuram Antichristi: unde, ibi quaedam leguntur quae non sunt in eo completa, implebuntur autem in Antichristo; sicut etiam aliqua de regno David et Salomonis leguntur quae non erant implenda in talium hominum regno, sed impleta fuere in regno Christi, in cuius figura dicta sunt: sicut Ps. 71: *Deus iudicium*, etc., qui est secundum titulum de regno David et Salomonis; at aliquid ponit in eo quod excedit facultatem ipsius, silicet *orietur in diebus ejus justitia et abundantia pacis donec aferuntur luna*; et iterum *Dominabitur a mari usque ad mare et a flumine usque ad terminus*, etc. Exponitur ergo Psalmus iste de regno Salomonis in quantum est figura regni Christi in quo omnia complebuntur ibi dicta."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. 17, Ch. 8 & St. Jerome, *In Osee Prophetam*, prologus, CCL 76, 3.

are said of certain things according as they took on a figure of Christ. And thus is this authority: for these were not sons of Israel, except insofar as they bore a likeness to the true, only-begotten son. And this is [what is meant by] *Out of Egypt I have called my son*, namely [my] unique [son].<sup>40</sup>

In such cases, there is no clear indication in the text itself that the sacred author primarily intended to refer to Christ. Yet we should not call this a mere accommodation, but rather an identification of a legitimate spiritual sense of the Old Testament passage made by the Evangelist with the help of the Holy Spirit. For St. Matthew specifically says that this prophecy was fulfilled, not adapted.

In summary, it should be admitted that while a number of Old Testament texts refer only to Christ, yet a significant number also refer to contemporary persons or events, and this is their literal sense. Nevertheless, among these latter, some contain indications that they also refer to Christ.

*C. Neither the Prophets nor the People could  
Conceive of Christ so Far in the Future.*

There is still another objection which is raised against the position that Christ is present in the literal sense of certain Old Testament passages. According to this objection, it does violence to the proper notion of sacred history to think that the ancient prophets, separated so far from Christ in time and

<sup>40</sup> *Super Ev. S. Matt. cap. II, sec. IV* (n. 216 in Marietti): "Videtur hic esse questio: quia non videtur hoc facere ad propositum, quia praemittitur ibi, *Puer Israel*, etc. (Hos. 11:1), et sic loqui videtur de vocatione Israel de Aegypto. Sed dicendum quod in omnibus auctoritatibus, quae in Evangeliiis vel in Epistolis ponuntur de Christo, quaedam distinctio notanda est: quia quaedam dicuntur specialiter de Christo sicut illud *Tamquam ovis ad occisionem ducetur* (Isa. 53:7); quaedam autem dicuntur de quibusdam secundum quod duxerunt figuram Christi. Et sic est ista auctoritas: isti enim non fuerunt filii Israel, nisi in quantum similitudinem gesserunt veri filii unigeniti. Et hoc est *Ex Aegypto vocavi filium meum*, silicet specialem."

culture, could conceive of Christ and express this in a way which would be meaningful for their contemporaries. Note here that it is not simply a question of whether or not, absolutely speaking, God could do such a thing as enlighten the mind of a prophet to see the distant future. Such a position would be based upon rationalist Philosophy rather than sound Theology. The issue at hand is more whether it is in keeping with the divine economy of salvation and the proper conception of history in general for God to enlighten a prophet to see a far distant event. An example of such an objection is found in the Jerome Biblical Commentary: "The rejection of prediction is really a rejection of a crude concept wherein the human authors were thought to foresee the distant future; a more sophisticated concept where, unbeknown to the human author, God uses Scripture to prepare for the future deserves much more attention than is given to it. . . ."<sup>41</sup> The Protestant scholar J. Smart has something similar to say: "Prediction in the Old Testament belongs in the context of promise and fulfillment. The prophet's knowledge of the future is not a mystic penetration of future events but a penetration by faith into the secret counsel of God by which future events are determined." And a little later: "A fixed scheme of prediction and fulfillment belongs together with a static conception of history in which from the beginning God has determined all events, a conception totally alien to the dynamic character of the prophetic faith in which history consists of a succession of situations in which the nation is called to choose between the way of life and the way of death."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> J.B.C. 71:53 (p. 615).

<sup>42</sup> Smart, J., *The Interpretation of Scripture*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1961, 104. Cf. Grelot, "L'accomplissement des Écritures en Jésus-Christ," *Le Christ, envoyé de Dieu*, Bulletin du Comité des Études, Compagnie de Saint-Sulpice, 35, Paris, (1961) 365-86. Though we cannot devote time to it here, Smart's position presupposes, in part, the fact that in many cases what was foretold or predicted did not come to pass, at least not in the way which the obvious sense of the words

Certainly, the Old Testament prepares for the New in ways other than simple prediction of future events, but this is not to exclude prediction of future events as *one* way in which the Old Testament prepares for the New. And so, the question which needs to be addressed here is not whether a concept is "crude" or "sophisticated," "static" or "dynamic" but rather whether it is revealed or not revealed to be the case. Does the concept of prediction of the far distant future have a basis in Scripture? In fact, the Scriptures testify in the plainest terms in multiple passages that sometimes prophecy is of the far distant future. Thus, in the Old Testament we read in Isaiah 48:5, "I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you;" and again in Sirach 48:25, "He revealed what was to occur to the end of time, and the hidden things before they came to pass."<sup>43</sup> The New Testament too is filled with an abundance of such passages: for

seemed to indicate. This phenomenon was well known to exegetes of all ages. St. Thomas, for example, proposes two kinds of prophecy in order to account for this: one which sees the future events in themselves (which prophecy is absolute) and one which sees the future in its causes (which prophecy is contingent when those causes are contingent). As a general rule, whenever a threat of punishment for wrongdoing is made, such a prophecy can be considered contingent upon the response of those threatened. Whenever a promise is made without being dependent upon the response of those to whom the promise is made, it can be considered absolute (cf. Rom. 11:29). We also note that Smart seems to have confused the gift of prophecy with the habit or act of faith. Prophecy must be distinct since it perfects the understanding in itself, not like faith which perfects the understanding through the affective faculty (i.e., the will). Thus, prophecy cannot be indistinct in the manner that faith can regarding those things for which he has the gift of prophecy. For this reason faith is likened to hearing in the Scriptures, while prophecy is likened to sight, on account of its greater distinctness (Cf. *De Veritate* Q. 12, a. 1, response to *sed contra* 4).

<sup>43</sup> See also: Dt. 13:1-5; 1 Kgs. 16:34; Isa. 44:6-7; Isa. 46:10; Sir. 42:19, and Ez. 38:17 among others. It is not possible to do an exegesis of each of these texts individually within the scope of an article of this nature. Nevertheless, an examination of the literary genre, context, and other circumstances of each of these citations reveal that the sense demanded

example, Galatians 3:8, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying: 'In you shall all the nations be blessed;'" and again, Acts 7:52, "and they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One," to which we might add many others.<sup>44</sup> The position that sometimes the predictions of the prophets were of a distant future event is not a matter of sophisticated or crude concepts, but a fact which is divinely revealed. It is difficult to see, therefore, how any account of salvation history which excludes the fact of prediction of distant future events can be reconciled with the data of revelation.

Someone might object, however, that according to the proper concept of history, as discovered and expounded in recent investigations into the philosophy of history, it is impossible for persons of one historical epoch to properly conceive of those things which belong to a radically different historical epoch.

In reply to this we must first of all note that this is a matter of philosophical theories which can only take into account what can be known through human reason. We might, with Shakespeare, reply to these objectors that "there are many more things in heaven and on earth than are even dreamt of

by the text is that there is such a thing as prediction of distant future events. Take the citation from Isa. 44:6-7 as an example: the immediate context of this text is a polemic against idolatry in which the Lord shows Himself to be superior to the idols. The prophet shows this superiority by two arguments: first from the operations that only God has the power to do (namely prediction of the future), and second from the origin of the idols themselves (namely their human makers and their matter). Thus, the force of the argument on the first count depends upon the true assertion that God foretells the future. The citation from Isa. 48 is similar, for in context, the divine majesty is shown by the operations that are properly divine, namely foretelling of the future (v. 3-11) and creation (v. 12) which operations distinguish the Lord from idols.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Jn. 1:43-45, Jn. 5:46, Jn. 12:41; Acts 3:22-24, Acts 10:42, Acts 13:27, Acts 26:22-23; Rom. 9:29 and 1 Pet. 1:10-11.

in your philosophy. . . ."<sup>45</sup> Secondly, even on simply philosophical grounds, there are serious problems which can be raised with such a position. Many things remain common experiences throughout the whole course of history, such as the basic aspects of reality (e.g., motion, substance, various plants and animals, the experiences of war, peace, life, death, family, social institutions, etc.). When we read about a lion killing a man in an ancient text, there is no reason why this cannot mean the same thing as when we read about a lion killing a man in yesterday's paper. Besides, we share a common human nature with those who authored the Old Testament and those to whom it was written. By and large, therefore, it appears that we have much more in common with those of former times than that which we do not share in common.

Moreover, it is not clear what is meant when it is claimed that the people to whom a revelation is given must be in a position to conceive of the things revealed to them. We should recall that it was to a people espousing radical monotheism and a wholly transcendent God that Christ revealed the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The truth of the matter is that there is no such thing as a historical epoch or culture for which the revelation of Christ would not imply a radical revision of patterns of thinking. The preparation for the revelation of Christ had more to do with docility to divine revelation than with concepts or categories of thought. And so it seems that such a revelation could have been given to the prophets of old.

To make the case even stronger that the true notion of salvation history involves the provision for predictions of distant future events, we can look to the prophecies of the New Testament. All the faithful from the first Apostles until our present generation have believed that certain very definite events will come to pass in accordance with the prophecies found in Scripture. We believe that the world will end one day. We

<sup>45</sup> *Hamlet*, act I, scene 5.

believe that Jesus Christ will come again bodily and in glory to judge the living and the dead at the end of the world.<sup>46</sup> We believe that at that time our bodies will rise from the earth, some to glory in the likeness of Christ's glorified body, some to everlasting damnation.<sup>47</sup> We believe that certain signs will precede the coming of Christ, such as the conversion of the Jewish people to Christianity. We believe that the Antichrist, a real individual, will come and will lead a mass apostasy, and that he will work wonders by the power of Satan so as to deceive many.<sup>48</sup> All of these are distinct truths about future events which we have understood in the same way as Christians of all ages (even the first Christians nearly 2000 years ago). And though belief about particular details may vary, the substance of these prophecies has been understood in the same way by the faithful ever since they have been uttered. In principle, therefore, there is no reason why a long span of time prevents successive generations from understanding certain prophecies as having substantially the same meaning. The prediction of future events has always been an important part of salvation history.

*D. The Nature of Biblical Prophecy Demands that it be Always Capable of Reinterpretation.*

There remains a further consideration drawn from the broad experience of a number of scholars who note that it is in the very nature of prophecy to be part of an organic and developing tradition. If prophecy is simply viewed as a prediction/fulfillment schema, they argue, this would result in a sterile and static concept of prophecy totally alien to the sacred texts themselves. Some authors go so far as to say that any concept of the literal fulfillment of prophecy in the Old Testament is against the very notion of religious prophecy. Thus,

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (C.C.C.), nn. 673-79.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 988 and following.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 674



I. Ramsey states: "If prophecy be fulfilled in a literal sense . . . then it would lack a distinctive religious point."<sup>49</sup> R. Carroll seems to consider it an essential element of prophecy that it be constantly reinterpreted: "We must see in the failure of prophecy the opportunity of prophecy to become a living tradition rather than a record of past successful predictions. It became necessary to reinterpret and maintain a transformation of tradition to rescue prophecy from that failure."<sup>50</sup> Thus, according to this position, it would seem that for prophecy to become part of a living tradition, it must not be an accurate prediction of the future based upon actual foreknowledge.

The first point to be admitted here is that the experience of these scholars corresponds to an important aspect of Old Testament prophecy. An in-depth consideration of sacred prophecy reveals that there is often a continuing development of prophetic traditions and even, apparently, reinterpretations of past prophecies.<sup>51</sup> Yet does this force us to the conclusion that previous prophecies must not be fulfilled in their literal sense? If all scriptural prophecy is the word of God, how can it be said to fail?<sup>52</sup> It is important to make some distinctions here if we are not to fall into the trap of emptying prophecy of any significant meaning other than, perhaps, a vague and subjective religious experience. As a first observation, scriptural interpreters of every age have recognized the fact that sometimes prophecies seem to fail, and have made distinctions between various kinds of prophecy in order to preserve the notion of prophecy in the strictest sense.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, we must distinguish between what a contemporary of a prophet may

<sup>49</sup> Ramsey, I., *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases*, New York, The MacMillan Company, 1967, 112.

<sup>50</sup> Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Retractions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*, London, SCM, 1979, 113.

<sup>51</sup> Consider, for example, the seventy years prophecy of Jer. 25 and the seventy weeks prophecy of Daniel 9.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Jn. 10:35, "Scripture cannot be broken."

<sup>53</sup> See note 43 above.

have understood by a given prophecy, and what the divine and human authors of the scriptures intended by a prophecy. In the case of prophecies which are made unconditionally, yet which seem to go unfulfilled according to a critical reading of the words of the prophecy, we must conclude that the sacred author intended to assert something other than that which a critical reading might convey. We are more certain that God's word cannot fail than we are of our tenuous interpretations of the words of Scripture. Finally, we must return to the principle enunciated by St. Thomas that God is the author not only of Scripture, but also of history. And so it is not necessary for a prophecy to fail in order to become part of a living and developing tradition. Often it happens that a prophecy is fulfilled in some historical event, but in such a way that the historical event is a foreshadowing of a future and more profound reality. Even in the New Testament prophecy takes on this distinctive character.<sup>54</sup> Besides this, prophecies can develop insofar as they are more clearly revealed as time goes on. Christ gives an example of this in His prophecies of His Passion which become clearer as He approaches His death.<sup>55</sup>

*E. The Magisterium Teaches that Christ is not Signified in the Old Testament According to the Literal Sense.*

The last objection which we shall consider is the position that the Magisterium teaches that Christ is not signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense. The text from the recently issued document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission seems to assert this:

Christian faith recognises the fulfillment, in Christ, of the Scriptures and the hopes of Israel, but it does not understand

<sup>54</sup> Thus, for example, the prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem also serve as prophecies about the end of the world. The prophecies about the coming of Elijah the prophet are fulfilled in part by the coming of John the Baptist, but will be fulfilled in full at the end of the world.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Matt. 17:22-23 and 20:17-19.

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.<sup>56</sup>

While it seems that this document teaches against the notion that Christ is signified according to the literal sense of the Old Testament, we shall make some cursory observations which cast doubt upon such an interpretation. First of all, the official version of the document is the French edition. There, the English word "literal" is not a translation of the equivalent French word "litteral," (although this French word is used in the earlier discussion of the literal sense of sacred Scripture). Rather, the English phrase "literal fulfillment" is used to translate the French expression "la simple realisation de ce qui etait ecrit," (the simple realization of that which was written). Thus, there is more room for interpretation in this case. If we do not take this expression to mean "literal fulfillment," but rather a fulfillment which transcends that which is described in the Old Testament Scriptures, there is a sense in which this is perfectly consistent with the position that Christ was signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense of the words. For certainly, whatever was said about Christ in the Old Testament was not as complete as the revelation which He brought in the New Testament.

Nevertheless, the main consideration here is that the P.B.C. is not an organ of the Magisterium of the Church (as it was in the past). Therefore, even if one could show that this document taught that Christ is not signified according to the literal sense of any Old Testament Scripture, one could not conclude from this that the Magisterium teaches this position.

With these things having been said, let us move on to examine evidence from tradition and the Magisterium which favor the position that the sacred authors of the Old Testament intended to signify Christ by their words.

<sup>56</sup> P.B.C., *op. cit.*, II A5, p. 48.

## II. Determination of the Fact (*Quia*) that Christ was Signified According to the Literal Sense

Positive Arguments from Scripture and Tradition that Christ was signified literally in the Old Testament

Now that we have considered and answered the main objections to the position that Christ is signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense, we move on to a consideration of the same topic as found in Scripture and the Tradition of the Church as expressed in the writings of the fathers, doctors, and Magisterium.

### A. Christ in the Old Testament According to the New Testament

The number of New Testament passages which refer to the presence of Christ in the Old Testament is too great to mention here. We simply restrict ourselves to citing those texts which indicate that the sacred human authors had *knowledge* of the mystery of Christ. Above we referred to a few of these, but here we shall quote them more copiously to manifest that the integral testimony of the New Testament clearly reveals that the prophets of the Old Testament not only wrote about Christ, but *knew* of Christ.

Thus, we read in the Gospel of John, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad."<sup>57</sup> And again, "Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him."<sup>58</sup> St. Luke cites St. Peter as teaching that David "foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ."<sup>59</sup> Paul has this to say: "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying: 'In you shall all the nations be blessed;'"<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Jn. 8:56

<sup>58</sup> Jn. 12:41

<sup>59</sup> Acts 2:31

<sup>60</sup> Gal. 3:8

St. Peter says: "The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when witnessing beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory."<sup>61</sup>

Not only this, but many passages of Scripture indicate that the prophets of the Old Testament had faith in Christ. But to have faith in Christ is to have some revealed knowledge of Christ. Hebrews 11:26 is particularly clear: "[Moses] considered abuse suffered for Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward." Again, speaking of the common faith of New Testament Christians and the faithful of the Old Testament, St. Paul says, "we have the same spirit of faith."<sup>62</sup>

Besides this, when our Lord confounds the Pharisees by showing that the Christ must be more than David's son,<sup>63</sup> this implies that the Old Testament is unintelligible without reference to a Christ whose origins are more than human.

Whatever position one wishes to take regarding the exegetical methods of the authors of the New Testament, the stark fact remains that they assert clearly that the prophets of the Old Testament had knowledge of Christ. Now all that is asserted by the sacred authors is also asserted by the Holy Spirit.<sup>64</sup> Thus, a brief survey of New Testament texts provides ample evidence to show that God has revealed that the holy ones of the Old Testament knew of Christ.

### B. Christ in the Old Testament According to the Fathers

Among many of the fathers of both the Western and Eastern Church we find clear indications that they believed that

<sup>61</sup> 1 Pet. 1:10-11

<sup>62</sup> 2 Cor. 4:13

<sup>63</sup> Matt. 22:41-46; Mk. 12:35-37; and Lk. 20:41-44.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Dei Verbum*, ch. 3, n. 11.

Fr. Sebastian Walshe, O.Praem.

the authors of the Old Testament intended to signify Christ in their original meaning. In fact, the fathers who teach this position either implicitly or explicitly are so numerous that it would be impossible to consider each of them even briefly here.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, we shall limit ourselves to two of the greatest fathers of the Church who represent the best elements of both eastern and western Theology on this point: Athanasius and Augustine.

Athanasius:

In his work *On the Incarnation*, St. Athanasius forcefully argues from the Old Testament Scriptures that our Lord Jesus Christ was the one foretold by the prophets:

Our arguments shall not delay to grapple with both [Jews and Gentiles], especially as the proofs at our command are as clear as day. For the Jews in their incredulity may be refuted from their Scriptures which even they themselves read; for this text and that, and, in a word, the whole inspired Scripture, cries aloud concerning these things, as even its express words abundantly show. For the prophets proclaimed beforehand concerning the wonder of the Virgin and the birth from her saying: "Lo, the Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which is being interpreted, God with us."<sup>66</sup>

Nor is even His death passed over in silence: on the contrary, it is referred to in the divine Scriptures, even exceeding clearly.<sup>67</sup>

From these we see that Athanasius held there to be abundant and clear references to Christ among the Old Testament Scriptures, and that these are found in "express words." After arguing from several passages of Scripture, including Psalm

<sup>65</sup> To cite only a few examples, see: Sts. Jerome (*In Osse Prophetam*, prologus; lett. 53 *ad Paulinus*), Bede (*super Lucam X*, 24) and John Chrysostom (*Apology Against the Jews*, *In Joan.*, Hom. 8).

<sup>66</sup> *On the Incarnation*, ch. 33.

<sup>67</sup> *On the Incarnation*, ch. 34.

## THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

21, and Isaiah 53, St. Athanasius continues, expressing his position that certain and demonstrative arguments can be drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures about Christ:

Or if not even this is sufficient for them, let them at least be silenced by another proof, seeing how clear its demonstrative force is.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, Athanasius removes the possibility of the coming of a future messiah other than Christ:

But perhaps being unable . . . to fight continually against the plain facts, they will, without denying what is written, maintain that they are looking for these things, and that the Word of God is not yet come. . . . But on this point they shall be all the more refuted, not at our hands, but at those of the most wise Daniel, who marks both the actual date and the divine sojourn of the Savior saying: "Seventy weeks are cut short upon thy people, and upon the holy city, for a full end to be made of sin, and for sins to be sealed up, and to blot out iniquities, and to make atonement for iniquities, and to bring everlasting righteousness, and to seal vision and prophet and to anoint a Holy of Holies; and thou shalt know and understand from the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem."<sup>69</sup>

From the foregoing and many other passages like them, it is clear that, according to the mind of St. Athanasius, references to Christ in the Old Testament are often clearly expressed in the literal sense. Moreover, these references reveal that the prophets had a clear and distinct knowledge of Christ (even to the very date of His coming) about Whom they prophesied. Thus, according to St. Athanasius, such passages can be used as the basis for sound and compelling arguments of the truth of the Christian faith.

<sup>68</sup> *On the Incarnation*, ch. 38.

<sup>69</sup> *On the Incarnation*, ch. 39.

*Fr. Sebastian Walshe, O.Praem.*

Augustine:

St. Augustine speaks clearly about the way in which Christ is signified by the Old Testament authors. One of the positions of the Manicheans was that Christ was not signified in the Old Testament Scriptures in any clear way. St. Augustine summarizes the Manichean position and outlines his response:

Surely by all these words Faustus proposes that the Hebrew Prophets either had not foretold anything about Christ, or if they did foretell something, their testimony is not beneficial to us, nor should we believe those very Prophets to have lived from the worth of their testimonies. And so, we will demonstrate both their foreknowledge of Christ, (and to what degree we ought to confide in them for the sake of the truth and firmness of the faith), and from their prophecy [we will] suitably and aptly [demonstrate] that they lived.<sup>70</sup>

Here and in other places St. Augustine clearly teaches not only that Christ is found in the Old Testament prophecies, but that at least some of the prophets clearly understood that they were speaking of Christ. For example, among his works we find the following statements:

In that people, the future course of events, from the coming of Christ to the present day, was prophesied through the agency of some who realized [*scientes*] and some who did not realize what they were doing.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, Cap. XII: "Nempe his omnibus verbis id agit Faustus, ut Prophetas Hebraeos neque quidam de Christo praenuntiavisse, neque si praenuntiaverunt, eorum testimonia nobis prodesse, neque illos ipsos ex eorumdem testimoniorum dignitate vixisse credamus. Nos itaque demonstrabimus et eorum de Christo praesagia, et quantum per ea nobis ad fidei veritatem firmitatemque consultum sit, et eos suae prophetiae congruenter apteque vixisse."

<sup>71</sup> *The City of God*, Bk. 7, ch. 32. See also: *Contra Faustum*, Lib. 14, par. 7.

St. Augustine not only held that some of the prophets clearly knew of Christ, but also that they expressed this knowledge according to both the literal and spiritual senses of the Scriptures:

For not only all the prophecies contained in words (*verbis*), not only all the precepts for the conduct of life, . . . but also the ceremonies, the priesthoods, the tabernacle or the temple, the sacrifices, the sacred rites, the festal days . . . all these were symbols and predictions which find their fulfillment in Christ.<sup>72</sup>

St. Augustine states in a great many places that these prophecies are often open and clear:

No one, however slow of wit, could fail to recognize in this passage the Christ whom we proclaim and in whom we believe.<sup>73</sup>

In one of these books, called the Wisdom of Solomon, Christ's passion is most expressly prophesied.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, Augustine observes that often there is some admixture of direct literal statements and allegorical statements referring to Christ:

Though there may be direct (*propriae*) and clear prophetic statements on any subject, allegorical statements are inevitably intermingled with them, and it is those especially that force upon scholars the laborious business of discussion and exposition for the benefit of the more slow witted.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, St. Augustine teaches that not only are there abundant passages in the Old Testament which refer clearly and openly to Christ, but also that we can forcefully demonstrate truths about Christ from them:

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. 17, ch. 16.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. 18.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. 17, ch. 16.

Moreover, the divine pronouncements reveal a diversity of sacrifices, in a manner suitable for the times, so that some might come about before the manifestation of the New Testament, which was ministered by that true victim of the one priest, that is, from the pouring out of the blood of Christ; and we, who are now called by that avowed name of Christian, offer another [sacrifice], which is demonstrated to be true not only by the Gospels, but also by the prophetic words.<sup>76</sup>

From the above testimony, we must conclude that that the position that Christ is signified in the Old Testament according to the intention of the sacred authors is in the best tradition of both the western and eastern fathers.

#### C. Christ in the Old Testament and the Notion of Fulfillment According to St. Thomas:

Let us now consider the same question as found in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, the most authoritative of the doctors of the Church. Three texts of St. Thomas clearly manifest St. Thomas' position that prophecies about Christ are fulfilled according to the literal sense of Scripture. The first text is from St. Thomas' prooemium to his commentary on the Psalms of David which we have already quoted at length:

About the manner of explaining [the Psalms] it ought to be known that in the Psalter as in the other prophets we ought to avoid one error condemned in the Fifth Synod [Constantinople II]. For Theodore of Mopsuestia said that in sacred Scripture and the prophets nothing is said expressly

<sup>76</sup> *Epistulae* 102: "Dispertita autem divinis eloquiis sacrificia pro temporum congruentia, ut alia fierent ante manifestationem novi testamenti, quod ex ipsa vera et unius sacerdotis victima, hoc est ex fuso Christi sanguine ministratur, et aliud nunc, quod huic manifestationi congruum, qui iam declarato nomine christiani appellamur, offerimus, non solum evangelicis verum etiam propheticis litteris demonstratur."

about Christ, but rather about certain other things, and are adapted to Christ: just as in Psalm 21: *They divided my vestments among them*, etc., is said literally about David, not about Christ. However, this manner [of explaining the Psalms] was condemned in that council: and he who asserts that the Scriptures are thus to be expounded is a heretic. Therefore, blessed Jerome [in] "On Ezechiel" handed on to us a rule which we will keep in the Psalms: namely, that the things done are thus to be expounded as things figuring something of Christ or the Church. For as is said in 1 Cor. 10: *All these things happened to them in figure*. However, prophecy is sometimes said about things which were of that time, but were not said principally about them, but insofar as they are a figure of future things. And therefore, the Holy Spirit ordains that when such things are said, certain things are inserted which exceed the condition of that thing which is carried out, so that the soul might be elevated to a figure. Just as in Daniel many things are said about Antiochus in figure of the Antichrist: hence, there certain things are read which are not brought to completion in him, however they will be fulfilled in the Antichrist. Just as also some things are read about the reign of David and Solomon which were not fulfilled in the reign of these men, but would be fulfilled in the reign of Christ, in whose figure they are said: as in Ps. 72, *God, [give to the king Thy] judgement*, etc., which is, according to the title, about the reign of David and Solomon, but [there is] something placed in it which exceeds the capacity of it, namely *there will arise in his days justice and abundance of peace until the moon is borne away*; and again, *He shall rule from sea to sea and from the river to the ends [of the earth]*. Therefore, this Psalm is expounded about the reign of Solomon insofar as it is a figure of the reign of Christ in which all the things said there will be completed.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Super Psalmos David*, Prooemium: "Circa modum exponendi sciendum est, quod tam in psalterio quam in aliis prophetiis exponendis evitare debemus unum errorem damnatum in Quinta synodo. Theodorus enim Mopsuestenus dixit, quod in sacra Scriptura et prophetiis nihil ex-

The second text is from the first chapter of St. Thomas' commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew:

The other [error] was that of Theodore who said that none of those things which are introduced from the Old Testament, is [said] literally about Christ, but [that] they are adapted [to Christ]. Just as when they introduce that [line] of Virgil: *Remembering such things he was hanging, and there transfixed remained*, for this is adapted to Christ. And then that [which is said by the Evangelist] "So that it might be fulfilled," ought to be explained thus: as if the Evangelist had said "and this is able to be adapted." Against which [it is said in the] last chapter of Luke, v. 44: *It was necessary to fulfill all the things which were written in the law of Moses, and the prophets and the psalms about me*. And it ought to be known that in the Old Testament some things are referred to Christ, and

presse dicitur de Christo, sed de quibusdam aliis rebus, sed adaptaverunt Christo: sicut illud Psalm 21: *Diviserunt sibi vestimenta mea*, etc., non de Christo, sed ad literam dicitur de David. Hic autem modus damnatus est in illo concilio: et qui asserit sic exponendas Scripturas, haereticus est. Beatus ergo Hieronymus super Ezechiel tradidit nobis unam regulam quam servabimus in Psalmis: scilicet quod sic sunt exponendi de rebus gestis, ut figurantibus aliquid de Christo vel ecclesia. Ut enim dicitur 1 Cor. 10: *Omnia in figura contingebant illis*. Prophetiae autem aliquando dicuntur de rebus quae tunc temporis erant, sed non principaliter dicuntur de eis, sed in quantum figura sunt futuorum. Et ideo Spiritus Sanctus ordinavit quod quando talia dicuntur, inserantur quaedam quae excedunt conditionem illius rei gestae, ut animus elevatur ad figuratum. Sicut in Daniele multa dicuntur de Anthioco in figuram Antichristi: unde, ibi quaedam leguntur quae non sunt in eo completa, implebuntur autem in Antichristo; sicut etiam aliqua de regno David et Salomonis leguntur quae non erant implenda in talium hominum regno, sed impleta fuere in regno Christi, in cuius figura dicta sunt: sicut Ps. 71: *Deus iudicium*, etc., qui est secundum titulum de regno David et Salomonis; at aliquid ponit in eo quod excedit facultatem ipsius, scilicet *orientur in diebus ejus justitia et abundantia pacis donec auferuntur luna*; et iterum *Dominabitur a mari usque ad mare et a flumine usque ad terminus*, etc. Exponitur ergo Psalmus iste de regno Salomonis in quantum est figura regni Christi in quo omnia complebuntur ibi dicta."

are said only about him, such as that [prophecy of Isaiah] *Behold, a virgin shall conceive in her womb, and shall bear a son,* and that [Psalm 21] *God, my God, look upon me, why have you abandoned me?* And if anyone posits another literal sense, he would be a heretic, and [this] heresy is condemned. But since not only the words of the Old Testament, but even the deeds signify Christ, sometimes certain things are said literally about someone else, but are referred to Christ, insofar as they bear the figure of Christ, just as it is said about Solomon *And he shall rule from sea to sea,* etc. (Ps. 71:8); for this was not fulfilled in him [i.e., Solomon].<sup>78</sup>

The third text is from St. Thomas' Commentary on the Gospel of St. John:

But through that which is said secondly *And he spoke of him,* is excluded the error of the Manicheans who said that no prophecies in the Old Testament are made in advance about Christ, as Augustine narrates in the book *Against Faustus*; and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who said that all prophecies of the Old Testament were said about some other matter, but nevertheless through a certain appropriation were brought to bear on the ministry of Christ by the Apostles and Evan-

<sup>78</sup> *Super Ev. S. Matt.*, Ch. I, sec.V: "Alius [error] fuit Theodori dicentis, quod nihil eorum quae inducuntur de Veteri Testamento, sunt ad litteram de Christo, sed sunt adapta, sicut quando inducunt illud Virgilii: *Talia pendeat memorans, fixusque manebat*, hoc enim adaptatum est de Christo; et tunc illud 'Ut adimpleretur,' debet sic exponit, quasi diceret Evangelista: 'Et hoc potest adaptari.' Contra quod Lc. Ult., 44: *Oportet impleri omnia quae scripta sunt in lege Moysi, et prophetis, et psalmis de me.* Et sciendum quod in Veteri Testamento aliqua sunt quae referuntur ad Christum, et de eo solo dicuntur, sicut illud *Ecce virgo in utero concipiet, et pariet filium*, (Isa. 7:14); et illud *Deus, Deus meus, respice in me, quare me dereliquisti?*, etc. (Ps. 21:2). Et si quis alium sensum literalem poneret, esset haereticus, et haeresis damnata est. Sed quia non solum verba Veteris Testamenti, sed etiam facta significant de Christo, aliquando dicuntur aliqua ad litteram de aliquibus aliis, sed referuntur ad Christum, in quantum illa gerunt figuram Christi, sicut de Salomone dicitur *Et dominabitur a mari usque ad mare*, etc. (Ps. 71:8); hoc enim non fuit impletum in eo."

gelists: as those things which they said in one deed are able to be adapted to another deed. All these things, however, are excluded through that which is said *And he spoke of him,* of me, just as about Moses (above Jn. 5:46) Christ said: *for he wrote about me.*<sup>79</sup>

From these three texts we can draw a number of points. First, St. Thomas holds the position that there are things said about Christ in the Old Testament according to the literal sense. That is to say, the Old Testament Prophets and the Psalmist intended to signify something about Christ in the words they wrote. He bases his position upon sacred revelation by citing John 5:46 and 12:41 which clearly attribute to Moses and Isaiah some knowledge of Christ.

Second, St. Thomas considers the opposite position to be a condemned heresy (namely the position that nothing is said about Christ in the Old Testament according to the literal sense). He bases his position upon the proceedings of the Fifth Synod (Constantinople II), which we shall consider in more detail later. Moreover, St. Thomas even goes so far as to say that, according to the council, if certain texts (Isa. 7:14 and Ps. 21, for example) are asserted to have any other literal meaning than that which refers to Christ, such an assertion would be heretical.

Third, St. Thomas, following St. Jerome, gives an exegetical principle by which a text can be determined to refer to

<sup>79</sup> *Super Joannem*, Cap. XII, lect.VII, sec.V: "Per illud vero quod secundo dicitur *Et locutus est de eo*, excluditur error Manichaeorum, qui dixerunt nullas prophetias in Veteri Testamento praecessisse de Christo, ut Augustinus narrat in lib. *Contra Faustum*, et Theodorum Mopsuestenum, qui dixit omnes Prophetias Veteris Testamenti esse de aliquo negotio dictas, per quamdam tamen appropriationem esse adductas ab Apostolis et Evangelistis ad ministerium Christi: sicut ea quae dicunt in uno facto, possunt adaptari ad aliud factum. Omnia autem excluduntur per hoc quod dicitur *Et locutus est de eo*, de me sicut de Moyse, supra (Jn 5:46), dixit Christus: *de me enim ille scripsit.*"

Christ. If the text contains some assertion which exceeds the conditions of the person about whom it seems to be said, this is an indication that the text ought to be taken to refer to Christ. For if the text were not interpreted in such a manner, it would assert something false, and this is not possible in Holy Scripture.

Fourth, St. Thomas distinguishes two ways in which a text might be taken to refer to Christ. Sometimes, a prophecy refers only to Christ, and not to some current event or person. Sometimes a prophecy refers in its literal sense to some historical event or person at the time in which the prophecy was made, yet is said of it principally insofar as it is a figure of Christ. We have already considered this position of St. Thomas in detail above.

Finally, St. Thomas distinguishes fulfillment from adaptation. In both cases he recognizes a potentiality of meaning by which the words might be interpreted concerning Christ; but in the case of fulfillment, this potentiality of meaning is, in fact, a meaning directly intended by the sacred human author, while in the case of adaptation, it is a meaning not intended by the sacred human author, but rather is a meaning understood by the reader. It is important to note that for a prophecy to be fulfilled, it must correspond to the intention of the sacred *human* author, since, as St. Thomas shows, the Holy Spirit can even be said to intend those meanings which are adapted to the text:

It is not incredible that Moses and the other authors of the Holy Books were divinely given to know the various truths that men would discover in the text, and that they expressed them under one sequence of text, so that every one of them be the sense of the author. And even if the commentators suit (*aptentur*) certain truths to the sacred text that were not understood by the author, without doubt the Holy Ghost understood them, since He is the principal author of Holy Scripture. Consequently, every truth that can be suited (*ap-*

*tari*) to the sacred text, while maintaining the context of the passage, is the sense of Holy Scripture.<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, if only the Holy Spirit understood or intended this meaning, it could not be called prophecy, since prophecy is properly in the soul of the human author, not in the mind of God: men are called prophets, but God is not. Thus, according to this account, for the text to have a potentiality of meaning which corresponds to the notion of prophetic fulfillment, it is not enough to hold that the Holy Spirit understood what meanings a text would later be given (for this is true of every meaning that might be adapted to a text). Rather, it is necessary to hold that, for a scriptural text to have a potentiality of meaning which corresponds to the notion of fulfillment, the human author must have understood and intended this meaning.

In summary, according to St. Thomas, Christ was signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense. Moreover, in his account, the concept of fulfillment requires that that which is fulfilled be fulfilled according to the principal intention of the sacred human author. Thus, whenever the words of the Old Testament Scripture are fulfilled in Christ, this indicates that these words were principally intended by their author to refer to Christ.

*D. Christ in the Old Testament  
According to the Magisterium:*

We must now consider what the Magisterium has taught concerning whether or not Christ is signified in the Old Testament according to the intention of the sacred authors. We shall begin by an examination of the teaching of Constantinople II and, thereafter, proceed to consider more recent magisterial statements.

<sup>80</sup> *De Potentia*, Bk. 4, a. 1, *corpus*; see also St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Bk. III, ch. 27.



The Second Council of Constantinople:

The Fifth Ecumenical Council, held at Constantinople (553) is better known for its condemnations of the christological heresies of Nestorius and Theodore of Mopsuestia. What is less widely known is that certain methods of interpreting the Old Testament were also condemned in this Council. Indeed, it appears that these christological heresies were founded upon and intimately connected to a particular method of scriptural exegesis: a method apparently used and taught by Theodore of Mopsuestia.

From the start we should make it clear that here we are not attempting to determine whether the Council correctly condemned Theodore.<sup>81</sup> Rather, I wish to show solely from the documentation before the Council fathers (i.e., the writings attributed to Theodore) that the Council intended to condemn the position that Christ was not signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense of the words.

The Council clearly indicated that the method of interpretation (attributed to Theodore) of certain scripture passages was opposed to the Catholic faith. From the sentence against the Three Chapters we read:

This disgraceful man, who had made a promise to understand the Scriptures did not remember the words of the prophet Hosea saying: *Woe to them, for they have departed from me: they have been made notorious because they were disloyal unto me, they have spoken iniquities against me, and the ones plotting against me have spoken most wicked things. Therefore, they fall upon the spear because of the wickedness of their tongues. Herein their contempt is in their bosom: since they have transgressed my testament, and they have acted wickedly against my law.* (Hos. 7:13-8:1). He dismissed the prophecies about Christ and he vilified, as far as he could, the great mystery of the arrange-

<sup>81</sup> Even in view of the recent investigation into this point, it is my opinion that Theodore's position was correctly represented and, hence, that Theodore was justly condemned by the council.

ments that have been made for our salvation. In many ways, he tried to demonstrate that the divine word was nothing but fables composed for the amusement of the gentiles, and he greatly disdained the other prophetic pronouncements made against the impious.<sup>82</sup>

In another place we read

Anathema Theodore, and his writings. These things are foreign to the Church. These things are foreign to the orthodox. These things are foreign to the Fathers. These things are full of impiety. These things are foreign to the synod. These things impugn the divine Scriptures.<sup>83</sup>

What are these writings which are condemned? At least they must be considered to include the writings which had been read in the council proceedings before this anathema. Among the writings read and ascribed to Theodore at the council were interpretations of passages in Psalms 8, 15, 21 and 68,<sup>84</sup> an interpretation of the Song of Songs, and excerpts from Theodore's commentary on the twelve minor prophets.<sup>85</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will limit myself to a couple of citations:

<sup>82</sup> Mansi, vol. 9, col. 371: "Scripturas scire miser ille pollicitus, non memnit Osee prophetae dicentis: *Vae illis, quoniam exilierunt a me: famosi facti sunt, quia impii fuerunt in me, iniqua locuti sunt adversum me, et adversum me excogitantes, locuti sunt pessima. Ideo cadent in framea propter improbitatem linguae suae. Hic contemptus eorum in sinu eorum: quia transierunt testamentum meum, et adversus legem meam impie egerunt. Istus Theodorus impius merito subiicitur. Prophetas enim, quae de Christo sunt, reiiciens, festinavit dispensationis pro nostra salute magnum mysterium, quantum ad se pertinet, reprobare: fabulas tantummodo ad risum propositas gentibus divina eloquia, multis modis conatus ostendere, et contempsit tam alias propheticas pronuntiationes contra impios factas."*

<sup>83</sup> Mansi, vol. 9, col. 215: "Anathema Theodoro, et conscriptus ejus. Haec aliena ecclesiae sunt. Haec aliena orthodoxis sunt. Haec aliena patribus sunt. Haec impietate plena sunt. Haec aliena synodis sunt. Haec divinas scripturas impugnant."

<sup>84</sup> All according to the Vulgate numbering.

<sup>85</sup> See Mansi, vol. 9, col. 211-213, nos. XIX-XXIV; and Schwartz-Straub, Tomus IV, vol. I, pp. 53-54.

Of the same [Theodore] from the beginning of the comments which he wrote on the twelve prophets, denying that [their] prophecies foretold about Christ: "But not willing to consider these things, they try to draw all words to the Lord Christ, so that also that which was done in regard to the people they might understand in the same way; and they make the Jews laugh when the pertinent words from the passage of Scripture show nothing about Christ."<sup>86</sup>

Again, Theodore attempts to interpret Psalm 21 as referring to David:

Of the same [Theodore] on Psalm twenty one: "*They have hollowed out my hands and feet and examined all that I was doing and trying to do.* 'They have hollowed out:' by way of this metaphor, he has spoken of those who, by their digging, try to examine what is in the depth of his heart. *They have numbered all my bones:* they took hold of all my strength and all my very substance, so as even to range all that is mine under a number. He said this for this is how, by custom, an enemy held things: when they had won possession, they made careful note of everything found by number and type. Wherefore, he says next: *They have looked upon me and regarded me* and he adds, *they have divided my garments among them and over my vestment have they cast lots.* Looking upon me, says he, and seeing all that they had desired against me has come to pass (for to look upon him in such a way is said among us in fact to mean: one sees in him what one wanted him to suffer), with me already as one completely given over to evil men, and as though the enemy, after laying waste and taking me captive, has divided my goods, portioning them out by lot. And the Evangelist takes these words from the events [they described] and uses them of the Lord, even as

<sup>86</sup> Ibid: "XX. Ejusdem ex principio commentii quod in duodecim prophetas scripsit, abnegans prophetias de Christo esse praedictas: 'Sed non volens ista considerare, voces omnes trahere ad dominum tentant Christum, ut et quae de populo facta sunt, simili modo intelligerent, et risum praestarent Judaeis, quando ex scriptorum sequentia nihil ad dominum Christum pertinentes ostendunt voces.'"

we have said here and in other places. For we have clearly shown above that the Psalm does not actually belong to the Lord, but rather blessed David said these things somewhat excessively as a result of what was done by Absalom. For when David had retreated, he [Absalom] had entered the capital by right of war and taken possession of all the royal treasure, *and he was not ashamed even to defile his father's bed.*"<sup>87</sup>

Upon examination, the other citations from Theodore's commentaries on Psalms 15, 21 and 68, are found to have a common element with the above-quoted text: namely, in each case Theodore is cited as saying something to the effect that the words of the psalm are adapted to or used to refer to our Lord, although they were not intended by the sacred human author to signify Him originally.

What did the Council fathers find condemnable in these passages if not the assertion that the prophets and the Psalms said nothing about Christ according to the intention of the sacred author, and the assertion that these prophecies show

<sup>87</sup> Mansi, vol. 9, col. 212: "XXIII. Ejusdem in Psalmo vigesimo primo: '*Foderunt manus meas, et omnia perscrutabantur et quae agebam et quae conabar.* Nam foderunt, ex translatione dixit eorum, qui per effossionem scrutari quae in profundo sunt tentant: *Dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea, totius meae fortitudinis et totius meae substantiae detentores facti sunt, ut etiam numero mea subjicerent.* Istud autem ex consuetudine quam habent hostes, dixit: qui quando obtinuerint, numero et talis subtilem notitiam in ventorum faciunt. Propterea et sequenter dicens: *Ipsi vero consideraverunt et conspexerunt me, intulit: Diviserunt sibi vestimenta mea, et supra vestimentum meum miserunt sortem.* Considerantes autem me ait et conspicientes quod omnia eis evenerunt in mea desiderata (conspicere enim ita ut apud nos; dicitur pro eo quod est, Vidit in eum quae volebat pati eum) jam tamquam me omnio malis dedito, sicut et hostes mea post vastationem et captivitatem diviserunt sorte divisionem eorum facientes. Et evangelista quidem in domino verba ex rebus assumens, eis usus, ut sic et in aliis diximus. Nam quod non pertineat ad dominum psalmus, in superioribus evidenter ostendimus. At vero beatus David supra modum ista magis ex his quae ab Absalom facta sunt, dixit: quoniam dum recessisset David, jure belli metropolium ingressus, omnes quidem obtinuit res regales, *non piguit autem etiam patris cubile inquinare.*'"

nothing about Christ in a convincing manner? For this is the common element to all the condemned texts. But perhaps someone might say that the council objected only to the position that Christ was not found in the prophets and psalms in any way. Perhaps the council would have accepted a position which holds that Christ was present only according to the spiritual sense (i.e., as signified by the things to which the words of Scripture refer). But this certainly cannot be upheld. For it is clear from other excerpts of writings attributed to Theodore at the council that he admitted that Christ was present in the Old Testament Scriptures at least according to a spiritual sense. This is clear from the creed attributed to Theodore: "[He was] constituted from the seed of Abraham and David, according to the declaration of the divine Scriptures."<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the exposition of Psalm 8 attributed to Theodore<sup>89</sup> clearly reveals that the Council fathers were aware that Theodore thought that Christ was present in the Old Testament, at least in an allegorical sense. According to these passages, therefore, it is clear that the Council understood that Theodore admitted that Christ was present in the Old Testament Scriptures in some way, yet not according to the expressed intention of the sacred author. Therefore, the obvious reason why his method of interpretation was condemned was that he held that Christ was not signified clearly in the Scriptures according to the literal sense.

Other Magisterial Pronouncements:

Besides the condemnations of Constantinople II, there are other statements of the Magisterium which implicitly reject the position that Christ is not signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense. For example, the second propo-

<sup>88</sup> Mansi, vol. 9, col. 228: "a semine constitutum Abraham et David, secundum declarationem scripturarum divinarum."

<sup>89</sup> See Mansi, vol. 9, col. 211.

sition of the Anti-Modernist oath (promulgated by St. Pope Pius X, Sept. 1, 1910) states:

I admit and recognize the external arguments of revelation, that is, divine facts and in the first place miracles and prophecies, as most certain signs of the divine origin of the Christian religion; and I hold that these same arguments have been accommodated in the highest degree to the intelligence of all ages and men, even of these times.<sup>90</sup>

Now since prophecies can be the basis of "external arguments" which are "most certain signs" to all men, and since a certain argument from Scripture can be drawn only from the literal sense of Scripture,<sup>91</sup> then it follows that these prophecies must have signified Christ according to the literal sense.

Again, the commentary of the Roman Catechism (of Trent) on the fourth article of the creed states: "the oracles of Isaiah in particular are so clear and graphic that he might be said rather to have recorded a past than predicted a future event."<sup>92</sup> The clear contextual meaning of this passage is that, to an unbiased reader, at least certain prophecies of Isaiah clearly refer to Christ. Moreover, it indicates that Isaiah had a clear perception of what he was foretelling. But this implies that he intended to signify Christ directly by his words.

From the above statements, we can conclude that the Magisterium of the Church has always and consistently taught that Christ is signified by the prophets of the Old Testament according to the literal sense of what they wrote.

<sup>90</sup> "Externa revelationis argumenta, hoc est facta divina, in primisque miracula et prophetias admitto et agnosco tamquam signa certissima divinitus ortae christianae religionis, eademque teneo aetatum omnium atque hominum, etiam huius temporis, intelligentiae esse maxime accommodata." Cf. Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, chapter 3, second paragraph; Thesis 4 of the theses of Louis-Eugene Bautain from the mandate of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Religious, 26 April, 1844; and the response of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1 May, 1910, q. 8.

<sup>91</sup> St. Thomas, S.T., Ia, Q. 1, a. 10, ad 1.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. St. Jerome's Epistle 53 *ad Paulinus*.

Therefore, as the foregoing survey shows, the sacred Scriptures, the most eminent fathers, St. Thomas, and the Magisterium are in agreement with regard to the position that the sacred authors of the Old Testament intended to signify Christ in their words. Moreover, in some cases, the significations of Christ are open and clear, and thus are able to serve as the basis for a convincing argument to those who accept the Old Testament, even if they do not accept the New Testament as divinely inspired, (for it is sufficient that they admit the historical events which are described there, such as the crucifixion, actually happened). Finally, we see that a number of the great heresies of the past have taken the opposite position, including the heresy of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Manichean heresy, and, more recently, the Modernist heresy.

#### The Doctrine of the *Sensus Plenior*

Over the last century, attention has been focused upon the concept of a *sensus plenior*, a "fuller sense" of sacred Scripture. The classic definition of the *sensus plenior* of sacred Scripture was formulated by Fr. Raymond Brown:

The *sensus plenior* is the deeper meaning, intended by God, but not clearly intended by the human author, that is seen to exist in the words of Scripture when they are studied in the light of further revelation or of development in the understanding of revelation.<sup>93</sup>

The P.B.C. gives a slightly altered definition of the *sensus plenior* and identifies some criteria by which it can be determined if a *sensus plenior* is present in a biblical text:

The term *fuller sense (sensus plenior)*, which is relatively recent, has given rise to discussion. The fuller sense is defined as a deeper meaning of the text, intended by God but not clearly expressed by the human author. Its existence in the

<sup>93</sup> *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture*, p. 105; cf. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 71:57.

biblical text comes to be known when one studies the text in light of other biblical texts which utilize it or in its relationship with the internal development of revelation.<sup>94</sup>

Note here that the P.B.C. document prefers to speak of the *sensus plenior* as a meaning *of the text* which is not clearly *expressed* by the human author. This definition focuses more upon the text itself than on the intention of the sacred author.

The distinction of the *sensus plenior* from the various spiritual senses of sacred Scripture is clear since what is considered here is the meaning of the *words* of Scripture. Nevertheless, there appears to be a distinction between the *sensus plenior* and the strict literal sense as well. This distinction is based upon the unique fact that in sacred Scripture there are two authors and, therefore, two intentions at work: divine and human. Thus, there arises the possibility that God might intend a meaning of which the sacred author is not clearly aware. It is important, however, to determine what is meant by "clearly aware." On this point two positions can be taken: first, that the sacred human author did intend the meaning intended by God, but only in a vague or imperfect way; second, that the sacred human author did not intend, nor did he have any awareness, of the deeper sense intended by God.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.

<sup>95</sup> In his article on the "*Sensus Plenior* in the Last Ten Years," (C.B.Q. vol. 25 [1963]) Fr. Brown claims that the demand for consciousness on the part of the human author is a pseudo-problem: "A theoretic answer may be possible for these questions, but we doubt the feasibility of applying such an answer in practical exegesis." (p. 264). In fact, the art of exegesis normally moves from the text to the intention of the author, and not vice-versa. Yet it is important to recognize that the theoretical question of whether the sacred authors had some awareness of Christ has a bearing upon the practical conclusions which one might reach about the significance of their words. Even in cases where the art of exegesis is unable to discern with certitude the significance of a given text, still the Church, informed by sacred Tradition and with the help of the Holy Spirit is capable of discerning this meaning. And so it is important to

If the sacred human author only vaguely intends to signify what God has in mind in the sense that he does not intend the meaning which God intends *as distinctly and explicitly as God does*, then this does not seem to be really distinct from the literal sense after all. For this might be said of every word in Scripture. For who could say that any man has as clear and distinct a grasp of the concepts which he is signifying as God does?<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, if what is meant is that the sacred human author, though intending to signify the same reality as God, does not intend it *as distinctly and explicitly as God intends for later readers to understand it*, this also does not seem to differ essentially from the literal sense. For the literal sense of a text is the sense intended by the author, even if it be intended in an indistinct way. For the most part, when people use words they do not have distinct definitions of those words in mind when they say them. Nevertheless, they are capable of using these words correctly as if they implicitly knew the definitions.<sup>97</sup> It

resolve the theoretical question of whether or not the sacred authors of the Old Testament intended to signify Christ or not.

<sup>96</sup> This position is represented, for example, by James I. Packer: "The *sensus plenior* which texts acquire in their wider biblical context remains an extrapolation on the grammatico-historical plane, not a new projection onto the plane of allegory. And though God may have more to say to us from each text than its human author had in mind, God's meaning is never less than his. What he means, God means" ("Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics and Inerrancy," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussion on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Grehan (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian Reformed Publishing House, 1971), pp. 147-48).

<sup>97</sup> Josef Pieper brings this fact of our experience out marvelously in his essay on faith: "Perhaps the individual mind is scarcely capable of holding their [i.e., the words one uses] full richness of meanings in his consciousness. Then again, it seems to be the other side of the coin that an individual ordinarily, when he uses words unselfconsciously, usually means more than he ever consciously realizes. . . . Everyone, for example, thinks he knows precisely what so commonplace a word as 'resemblance' means. He will say, perhaps, that resemblance is 'agreement in several characteristics, in contradistinction to likeness, which is agree-

would not be surprising, then, if someone reading a statement should understand this statement more perfectly than the one who uttered it. Yet as long as the intention is directed to the same reality, the *substance of the meaning* remains the same.<sup>98</sup> St. Thomas indicates how this happens even with the angels who communicate the truths of revelation to men, and then further applies the same distinction to the prophets:

The mystery of the Incarnation is able to be considered in a two-fold way: either [1] as regards the substance of the

ment in all characteristics.' And what objections can be raised to so precise a definition which is, moreover, borrowed from a well known philosophical dictionary? Nevertheless, the definition is wrong, or at least it is incomplete. An essential element of the meaning is lacking. That, to be sure, will be observed only by one who examines the living usage of language. For a part of the living usage is not only what men actually say, but what they do not explicitly say. Another aspect of living usage is that words cannot be employed in certain contexts. Thus, Thomas Aquinas once made the point that we can meaningfully speak of a man's resemblance to his father, whereas it is obviously nonsensical and inadmissible to say that a father resembles his son. Herein it becomes apparent that the concept of 'resemblance' contains an element of meaning that has been overlooked in the apparently exact definition quoted above . . . namely, the element of descent and dependence. But who would claim that this initially hidden aspect of the meaning had been present to his consciousness, explicitly and fully, from the very beginning?" (From *Faith, Hope and Love*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997, pp. 20-21).

<sup>98</sup> We insist here upon the fact that in order for a prophecy to be fulfilled, the substance of the truth signified by the words of the prophet must correspond to the substance of the reality which comes to pass. It is not sufficient for the prophet to signify some general concept, or kernel of an idea, which in itself is not sufficiently determined to correspond to the reality which comes to pass. Thus, for example, if a prophet intended to signify by his words merely that a great leader would arise in Israel, this would not necessarily be said to be fulfilled in Christ; for this might be said of a multitude of men who actually came or might have come. The reason for this is that the gift of prophecy perfects the understanding in itself (unlike faith which perfects the understanding by way of the will). Hence, prophecy cannot be indistinct in the same way that faith can regarding those things for which one has the gift of prophecy. (Cf. *De Veritate*, Q. 12, a. 1, response to *sed contra* 4).

fact; and in this way all [the angels] knew from the beginning, namely, the Incarnation, the Passion, and things of this kind; or [2] as regards the conditions and circumstances of the mystery, namely that it be under such a reign, or at such an hour, and things of this kind. And this they did not know from the beginning. In these ways also the prophets and the evangelists differently narrate: since the prophets announced the substance of the fact, but the evangelists recounted the manner of fulfillment.<sup>99</sup>

While we cannot enter into a detailed discussion of the debates surrounding the *sensus plenior*, we believe that most of the difficulties can be resolved by distinguishing various modes of indistinct awareness on the part of the sacred human author.

If, on the other hand, one takes the position that the sacred human author was unaware of the meaning intended by God, this does seem to be truly distinct from the literal sense as we normally understand it.<sup>100</sup> For in this case it is not at all intended by the human author. Now there is nothing impossible about God moving a person to say words intending one meaning, while He intends another meaning (as the ex-

<sup>99</sup> *In II Sent.*, D. II, Q. 2, a. 4, *corpus*: "mysterium incarnationis dupliciter potest considerari: vel quantum ad substantiam facti; et sic omnes a principio cognoverunt, silicet incarnationem, passionem, et hujusmodi; vel quantum ad conditiones et circumstantias mysterii, silicet quod sub tali praeside, vel tali hora, et hujusmodi; et hoc a principio non cognoverunt. His etiam modis differenter enarrant propheta et evangelista: quia propheta annuntiavit substantiam facti, sed evangelista recitat expletionis modum." Cf. also *Super Isaiam*, Cap. 63: "Quamvis autem supremi angeli sciverint hujusmodi mysteria quantum ad substantiam facti, tamen quantum ad particulares circumstantias non perfecte sciebant."

<sup>100</sup> For example, see George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary*, p. 22. There, commenting upon a mariological reading of Rev. 21 Tavard asserts: "[A mariological reading] can be identified neither with the meaning intended by the author nor with the literal meaning of the text. It might be called a *sensus plenior*, a 'fuller sense,' the sense intended by the Holy Spirit if one knew with certainty that this was really the mind of the Spirit."

ample of Caiphas shows in John 11:49-51).<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, the question remains whether this is a real possibility when it comes to the inspiration of sacred Scripture.

First of all, if one is to hold that the Holy Spirit so inspired the sacred authors in such a way as to intend something by their words which the human authors themselves did not intend, it must be admitted that, strictly speaking, the meaning intended by God but not by the sacred authors was not revealed to the sacred authors. Hence, the meaning of such passages as applied to Christ would necessarily be something revealed at a later time. But to apply meanings to statements in the Scriptures retroactively, which meanings were not originally intended by the sacred human author, is not to fulfill his words but to adapt them or invest them with new meaning. And even if such an adaptation were sanctioned by the Holy Spirit through some further revelation or intervention of the Church, this seems to be incompatible with what the Church has taught many times about inspiration. The Church insists that the Holy Spirit used the sacred authors as free and rational instruments who understood rightly<sup>102</sup> what they were saying. *Dei Verbum*, ch. 3, strongly emphasizes the intimate connection with the mind of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of the sacred human authors. There we read that God "made full use of their powers and faculties," and that "all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be

<sup>101</sup> This example is typically considered as being a case of a double literal sense of a passage since Caiphas intended to signify one thing with his words and God intended to signify another. However, one might argue that the very words of Caiphas, (i.e., the vocal sounds which he uttered) could be considered as being things or deeds in themselves. In this way one might hold that the spiritual sense of those vocal sounds (i.e., their significance as things in themselves) was the redemptive death of Christ for the salvation of the whole people, while the literal sense pertains to the unjust execution of Jesus. This approach might avoid the difficulty of positing a double literal sense of his words; however, such an interpretation has its own difficulties.

<sup>102</sup> Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, II. D. 3. a.

regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit." Thus, the duty of the exegete is to "carefully search out what the sacred writers *really had in mind*, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words." In the same place we read: "the exegete must look for that meaning which the sacred writer, in a determined situation and given the circumstances of his time and culture, intended to express and did in fact express." Thus, from the perspective of Catholic teaching, it is difficult to see how the intention of the sacred author could be divorced from the divine intention.

However, the principal difficulty with the position that some portions of the sacred scriptures have meanings which are intended by God but not by the sacred human author is that, with respect to these meanings, the human author will only be an author *per accidens*.<sup>103</sup> Consider the following example where a text written by a sacred author has a new meaning conferred upon it by placing it into a new context. An author writes the word "bat" intending to signify a flying rodent, but a later author puts this same word into a new context by adding the words "I hit the ball with my. . . ." Even if the previous author supplied the material element (i.e., the word "bat") he would not, strictly speaking, be the author of that word in its new context, since it has a meaning unintended by the original author. Even where the terms are analogously related (e.g., when "see" is used to signify an act of sight or of the intelligence), there would seem to be some

<sup>103</sup> Fr. Bruce Vawter, C.M., argues for this position: "If this fuller or deeper meaning was reserved by God to Himself and did not enter into the writer's purview at all, do we not postulate a Biblical word effected outside of the control of the human author's will and judgment . . . and therefore not produced through a truly human instrumentality? . . . does not the acceptance of a *sensus plenior* [which involves no awareness on the part of the human writer] deprive this alleged scriptural sense of one of its essential elements, to the extent that logically it cannot be called scriptural at all?" *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) p. 115.

kind of awareness required on the part of the first author of the possibility of an analogous interpretation of his words for the first author to be called an author properly. And so, if a new context causes us to re-read an earlier text with a different meaning not intended by the original author, it cannot be said that the original writer is the author of the text having a new meaning.<sup>104</sup>

Now to hold that, with respect to the things said about Christ in the Old Testament, the human authors were not true authors is not in keeping with the divine economy. For God wills to make use of creatures in such a way as to bestow upon them the dignity of being causes in their own right. It is not in keeping, therefore, with the dignity of the sacred authors, nor is it befitting the divine goodness, that God use the sacred authors as unwitting mouthpieces whenever it was a matter of foretelling our Lord Jesus Christ, the One for whose sake all the Scriptures were written. To hold such a position would be to reduce the sacred authors to the status of Ciaphas, a prophet who knew not what he spoke about Christ. Against this it is said by the prophet Amos: "No indeed, the Lord Yahweh does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets," (Amos 3:7). Certainly we must hold the opposite view then; namely, that when

<sup>104</sup> Fr. Bruce Vawter, C.M., again points out the necessity of the author's intention for words to have meaning: "A text, of course, 'says' nothing at all; it is intelligent beings, and they alone, who use texts to say something. . . . If a pied font of type were, by one of those chances which the mathematicians say are not impossible, to form itself into recognizable words, it would still not be saying anything to anybody, not even if the words spelled out the Gettysburg Address or the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. For this reason, I cannot agree that it is 'worth noting that in the field of literature, modern criticism seems to be moving away from an emphasis upon what the author intended to an emphasis upon what his words actually convey.' Such a trend may have implications for abstract semantics or for depth psychology; it can hardly shed any light on the art of communication." Vawter, B., "The Fuller Sense: Some Considerations", in C.B.Q., 26 (1964), 89.

later sacred authors or the teaching Church interpret earlier passages, this is an identification, with the help of the Holy Spirit, of a meaning originally intended by the sacred authors of those passages.

From these considerations, we see that there are serious difficulties with the doctrine of the *sensus plenior* if it be taken to mean that the sacred authors did not intend to signify Christ at all.

### III. Demonstration of the Matter (*Propter Quid*)

#### Based upon the Church's Doctrine of Inspiration

As we noted at the beginning of this essay, the ultimate resolution of this question must come from revealed truth. In particular, we must determine precisely what has been revealed about scriptural inspiration itself in order to demonstrate that this inspiration so moved the minds of the sacred authors that they were able to, and in fact did, signify Christ according to the literal sense of what they wrote.

The first principle of the Church's doctrine on inspiration is that God so inspired the Scripture that it can be said to be His own word, and He can properly be called its Author.<sup>105</sup> Both Old and New Testaments clearly attest to this doctrine. So, for example, we read in virtually all the prophetic pronouncements "thus says the Lord," or "the Lord spoke to," or words equivalent to these. In the New Testament also we read that God "spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old;"<sup>106</sup> that He "spoke in David"<sup>107</sup> and that the prophets "spoke from God."<sup>108</sup> The very words of the Creed state that the Holy Spirit "has spoken through the prophets." So com-

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Dei Verbum*, ch. 3, n. 11. This teaching is based upon sacred Tradition as well as a number of scriptural passages, including Jn. 20:31, 2 Tim. 3:16, Heb. 4:7, 2 Pet. 1:19-20 and 3:15-16.

<sup>106</sup> Acts 3:21.

<sup>107</sup> Heb. 4:7.

<sup>108</sup> 2 Pet. 1:21.

plete is the identification of the words of canonical Scripture with the words of God, that they are said to be "written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit."<sup>109</sup> This identification of the word of God with the Scriptures does not exclude the true authorship of the sacred human writers, but rather demands it as we shall see below. Thus, the men through whom God has spoken are understood to be authors of the sacred texts in the truest sense of the word. For, "in composing the sacred books, God chose men and, while employed by Him, they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted."<sup>110</sup> Thus, each word of Scripture has two authors, one divine, and one human. We must now investigate the precise relationship between these two authors.

The key magisterial text in this regard is found in the encyclical letter *Providentissimus Deus* of Pope Leo XIII:

The fact that it was men whom the Holy Spirit took up as His instruments for writing does not mean that it was these inspired instruments—but not the primary author—who might have made an error. For, by supernatural power, He so moved and impelled them to write—He so assisted them when writing—that the things which He ordered, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise it could not be said that He was the Author of the entire Scripture.<sup>111</sup>

Here Pope Leo indicates that the sacred human author is related to the primary divine Author as instrument to principal

<sup>109</sup> *Providentissimus Deus*, D, 3a. Cf. John Paul II, preface to the 1993 Document of the P.B.C., *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.

<sup>110</sup> *Dei Verbum*, ch. 3, n. 11.

<sup>111</sup> *Providentissimus Deus*, D. 3. a.



agent.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, he indicates that the full faculties of these human instruments were employed so that the understanding and will of the sacred human authors cooperated freely with the divine Author. Moreover, even the verbal expressions of these instruments were aptly chosen to manifest the signifi-

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<sup>112</sup> There are some who discount this doctrine of instrumental causality as being an *a priori* philosophical construct. Thus, Fr. Raymond Brown, responding to the objections of S. de Aulsebrook and A. Ibanez in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary (71:66) states: "To decide from a philosophical theory of instrumentality what God could and could not have done in inspiring Scripture is risky, especially since all acknowledge that the instrumentality in the process of inspiration is unique. It is far better to work *a posteriori*: to see what God has done and then to formulate a theory that can account for it. It is also too *a priori* to argue that the human agent would cease to be a true author of Scripture if there were present in his words a sense he did not understand." We find this objection curious on many grounds. First of all, was not the doctrine of instrumental causality originally employed precisely because it fit the data of revelation? As the above quote from Pope Leo XIII makes clear, it is precisely because the data of revelation makes it clear that the Scriptures are both the word of God and the words of men that *requires* that the sacred human authors be the instruments of the divine Author. Thus, the notion that the sacred human authors are instruments of the divine Author is a *necessary* conclusion from the data of revelation which tells us that the Scriptures are the word of God. This is why Pope Leo says expressly: "Otherwise it *could not be said* that He was the Author of the entire Scripture." Far from being a philosophical category or imposition, the doctrine of instrumental causality is a necessary deduction which attains to the reality of inspiration in itself. We might also challenge Fr. Brown's assertion that the notion of instrumental causality is merely a "philosophical theory." Are there not many Scripture texts which reveal substantially the same reality? Consider the text of Ex. 4:10-16, where, *inter alia*, the Lord says to Moses concerning Aaron: "He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God." Again, in a broader context, the Lord says in Jn. 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches." Do these texts not reveal a kind of instrumental causality? Besides this we might add many other Scriptures (e.g., Jer. 1:9; Isa. 13:5; Matt. 9:6, and 10:20; Lk. 10:16; Philip. 2:13; 2 Cor. 2:10; Heb. 4:7 and Heb. 13:21-22, etc.)

cance of what they understood and willed to write. This doctrine of instrumental causality is in keeping with the divine economy since God wills to bestow upon His ministers the dignity of being true causes in their own right, even if their causality is secondary and subordinate to His. Furthermore, the use of human instruments proportions the word of God to the men to whom it is directed. For when God's word is brought about through human instruments, this makes it possible to come to understand His intentions through the medium of the intentions of the human instruments. Thus, St. Augustine says in *On Christian Doctrine*: "And in reading it [Scripture], men seek nothing more than to find out the thought and will of those by whom it was written, and through these to find out the will of God, in accordance with which they believe these men to have spoken."<sup>113</sup>

Here we come to the crux of the problem. Granted that the human authors of the Old Testament were somehow free and rational instruments of God, in what way was the Incarnate Word present to the souls of these sacred authors? In order to establish that the Old Testament authors intended to signify Christ, we must first establish (1) that God intended to signify Christ in the Old Testament and (2) that the sacred authors intended to signify what God intended.

God intended to Signify Christ in the Old Testament:

At first glance, our method here may seem backwards. After all, have we not admitted already that we can arrive at what God intends to signify in the Scriptures only by way of discerning what the sacred human authors intended to signify?<sup>114</sup> But here we are not speaking of any particular passage of the Old Testament. Rather, we are speaking of the global, or uni-

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<sup>113</sup> *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 5.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. *Dei Verbum*, ch. 3, n. 12.

versal, intention which God has in inspiring the authors of the Old Testament. Our question, therefore, is nothing other than what is the end or purpose of the Old Testament as such.

There are many opinions concerning exactly what God intended to reveal in the Old Testament. The Old Testament Scriptures are a complex work comprising prose, literature, poetry, prophecy, history, legislation, and myriad other forms of verbal expression. Nevertheless, whatever forms of expression may be found in the Old Testament, there can be no doubt that the overarching reason for God's intervention into human history through His inspiration of the sacred Scriptures was to communicate saving truth: that is, to communicate the truths which would make salvation possible to men.<sup>115</sup> All other forms of verbal expression in the Scriptures are ordained to this purpose. But the truth which is man's salvation is God himself, according to the words of John 17:3, "Eternal life is this, to know You, the one true God." From this it follows that the truth which God intended to reveal in the Old Testament is nothing other than Himself. But God's self-revelation is completely identified with Christ, according to John 14:6-9: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me," and a little later, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father." For in the economy of salvation, God does not will to reveal Himself through any other way than through Jesus Christ: "for there is no other name under heaven given unto men by which we must be saved."<sup>116</sup> In Jesus is contained the whole of divine

<sup>115</sup> *Dei Verbum*, ch. 3, n. 11, "... we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures." We note that a careful reading of the Latin text shows that the expression "for the sake of our salvation," is to be taken as a descriptive, not a restrictive clause. This is also confirmed by the citation to St. Augustine, *et alia*.

<sup>116</sup> Acts 4:12.

revelation, and nothing of saving revelation comes to man save through Jesus Christ.<sup>117</sup> Hence, John 17:3, says not only that eternal life is to know the one God, but continues: "and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." For no one can know the one, true God save through Christ. From this we must conclude that God intended to signify Christ in the Scriptures.

Moreover, we must assert this more specifically of the Old Testament. Otherwise salvation would not be accessible before the revelation of Christ in the New Testament. But many of the persons in the Old Testament are venerated as saints by the Church. Furthermore, we know from the New Testament that the holy ones of the Old Testament had faith in Christ.<sup>118</sup> Now faith in Christ presupposes that the ones who uttered prophecy about Christ be certain himself about this prophecy. Thus, St. Thomas argues:

Accordingly the prophet has the greatest certitude about those things which he knows by an express revelation, and he has it for certain that they are revealed to him by God; wherefore it is written (Jer. 26:15), "In truth the Lord sent me to you, to speak all these words in your hearing." Else, were he not certain about this, the faith which relies on the utterances of the prophet would not be certain.<sup>119</sup>

Yet the way in which Christ is signified in the Old Testament differs in an important way from the way in which He is signified in the New Testament. For the Old Testament Scriptures were ordained to revealing the Christ who was to come, while the New Testament reveals the Christ who has already come. Speaking of the signification of Christ in the sacraments of the Old and New Laws, St. Augustine remarks:

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Matt. 11:27; Jn. 1:18. Also see: *Dominus Jesus*, AAS 92 (2000:II) especially sec. I & III.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Rom. 4:5, 2 Cor. 4:13, Heb. 11:26. Also see S.T., IIIa, Q. 6, a. 3, ad 3.

<sup>119</sup> S.T., II-II, Q. 171, a. 5.

For if the sounds of the words by which we speak is changed on account of time, and the same thing is enunciated in a different way when it is about to happen and when it has already happened, just as these very two words which I have said *facienda* and *facta* did not sound with equal intervals of delays, nor with the same number of letters or syllables; why is it strange if the passion and resurrection of Christ was promised as yet to come, now by some signs of the sacraments, and now by others is announced as having already happened; seeing that the words themselves *facienda* and *facta*, *passurus*, and *passus*, and *resurrecturus* and *resurrexit* could neither be distended equally nor be pronounced the same? For what else are every and all bodily sacraments, if not certain visible words. . . .<sup>120</sup>

The same might be said of the words used to refer to Christ in the Old and New Testaments. Namely, that the end of the Old Testament and the end of the New Testament are the same insofar as both are for the sake of revealing the Incarnate Word. Yet the Old Testament did this incompletely and by way of preparation of Him who was to come, while the New Testament was the complete revelation of Him who had already come: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son."<sup>121</sup> In fact, this revelation of the Incarnate Word is the principle of unity of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>120</sup> *Contra Faustum*, Lib. XIX, cap. XVI: "Si enim soni verborum quibus loquimur, pro tempore commutantur, eademque res aliter enuntiatum *facienda*, aliter *facta*, nec paribus morarum intervallis, nec iisdem vel totidem litteris syllabivise sonuerunt: quid mirum si aliis mysteriorum signaculis passio et resurrectio Christi futura promissa est, aliis jam *facta* annuntiatum; quandoquidem ipsa verba, futurum at *factum*, *passurus* et *passus*, *resurrecturus* et *resurrexit*, nec tendi aequaliter, nec similiter sonare potuerunt? Quid enim sunt aliud quaeque corporalia sacramenta, nisi quaedam quasi verba visibilia. . . ."

<sup>121</sup> Heb. 1:1-2.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *Dei Verbum*, ch. 4, n. 14-15.

But if the Old Testament is for the sake of revealing the Incarnate Word who is to come, it follows that some words and statements within the Old Testament must be signs which signify Christ who is to come: for the Old Testament signifies first of all by way of words and statements. Moreover, the object of divine revelation (i.e., that which is revealed) is some truth. In human language, however, truth must be expressed in statements. Therefore, if no single statement of the Old Testament signifies the coming of the Incarnate Word, it would follow that the Incarnate Word was not revealed in the Old Testament, which we have already demonstrated to be false. Therefore, we must conclude that God intended to signify the Incarnate Word through some statements of the Old Testament. It remains to see if the sacred authors of the Old Testament had the same intention when they wrote these statements signifying Christ.

#### The Authors of the Old Testament Intended What God Intended

At this point it will be helpful to take note of the close parallel or analogy which exists between the sacred Scriptures and the sacraments. The reason for this analogy is that both are signs of divine realities. The Scriptures are signs of divine truth, while the sacraments are signs of divine grace. Therefore, we should not be surprised to find that there is a close relation between the way in which these two kinds of sign signify. Interestingly, the theology of the sacraments is more developed in this area and can serve as an aid in understanding the way in which the Scriptures signify.

Human words, spoken and written, are signs of the intention of the one who uses them. Without this intention, such sounds or symbols are devoid of meaning. Therefore, these words and statements—these signs—must be invested with meaning by way of an intention:

When a thing is indifferent to many uses, it must needs be determined to one, if that one has to be effected. Now those things which are done in the sacraments can be done with various intent . . . consequently, it needs to be determined to one purpose, i.e., the sacramental effect, by the intention of him who washes. And this intention is expressed by the words which are pronounced in the sacraments.<sup>123</sup>

But as the sacraments are certain signs which must be determined to one signification by the intention of the minister, so also words themselves are signs which must be determined to some definite meaning by the intention of their author. For as we have shown above, the same vocal sound or written symbol might have various meanings, and this is especially manifest in the case of figurative speech. Now, since God has chosen human instruments as a means of authoring the Scriptures, it must happen that these instruments determine the meanings of the words they employ by their own proper intentions:

An inanimate instrument has no intention regarding the effect; but instead of the intention there is the motion whereby it is moved by the principal agent. But an animate instrument, such as a minister, is not only moved, but in a sense moves itself, insofar as by his will he moves his bodily members to act. Consequently, his intention is required whereby he subjects himself to the principal agent.<sup>124</sup>

That is, unless the human author unites and subordinates his intention with the divine intention, he will not be an instrument, and his words will not be God's words. Therefore, just as in the administration of the sacraments, the intention of the minister of the sacrament is required for the communication of grace, so also in the production of the Scriptures, the union of the intention of the sacred author with the divine intention is necessary for the communication of divine truth.

<sup>123</sup> S.T., IIIa, Q. 64, a. 8.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., ad 1.

A Second Argument: The Incarnate Word as the Exemplar of both Old and New Testaments

It is important to frame the above discourse within a broader theological vision. This broader vision takes into account the truth that the Incarnate Word is Himself the exemplar after which the Scriptures are patterned. That is, the Incarnation of the Word is the primary analogate in light of which the Scriptures are to be understood. More specifically, the Incarnate Word is the model in light of which the cooperation of the human author of Scripture with the Divine Author of Scripture is to be understood. The principle formulated in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and later reiterated in *Dei Verbum* concerning the relationship of inspired texts to the mystery of the Incarnation is of key importance here. "Indeed the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men."<sup>125</sup>

The reason for the likeness between the Scriptures and the Incarnation is that every effect resembles and is in some way conformed to its cause. Thus, this likeness to the Incarnation is not found only in the Scriptures, but also in the sacraments of the Church.<sup>126</sup> For as we observed above, the sacraments are signs of divine grace while the Scriptures are signs of divine truth. But the likeness of the Scriptures to the Incarnate Word holds in a particular way, "For Christ is naturally the Word of God; moreover, every word inspired by God is a

<sup>125</sup> *Dei Verbum*, ch. 3, n. 13.

<sup>126</sup> "In the first place, [the sacraments] can be considered in regard to the cause of sanctification, which is the Word Incarnate: to Whom the sacraments have a certain conformity, in that the word is joined to the sensible sign, just as in the mystery of the Incarnation the Word of God is united to sensible flesh." (S.T., IIIa, Q. 60, a. 6). Interestingly, Adrienne Von Speyr makes substantially the same point with regard to the sacrament of Confession in her essay on the same.

certain participated likeness of Him."<sup>127</sup> Now divine truth comes to be in the soul of the believer by the agency of God who teaches men. And the principal instrument by which God taught men was the humanity of Christ which contains the fullness of divine truth: "He was full of grace and truth . . . from His fullness we have all received: grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."<sup>128</sup> But as we have seen, in the production of the Scriptures, God used the sacred authors as instruments as well. Here, again, there is a close parallel to the sacraments:

An instrument is two-fold: the one separate, as a stick, for instance; the other united, as a hand. Moreover, the separate instrument is moved by means of the united instrument, as a stick by the hand. Now the principal efficient cause of grace is God Himself, in comparison with whom Christ's humanity is as a united instrument, whereas the sacrament is as a separate instrument.<sup>129</sup>

Thus, we might say that while the humanity of Christ is the cause of divine truth as a united instrument,<sup>130</sup> the Scriptures are a cause of divine truth in the soul of the believer as a separated instrument. But not only are the sacraments and the Scriptures instruments, but also the ministers of the sacraments and the authors of the Scriptures as well. Thus, Pius XII says in *Mystici Corporis*: "From heaven He assisted the Evangelists in such a way that *as members of Christ*, they wrote what they had learnt, as it were, at the dictation of the head. . . ."<sup>131</sup>

<sup>127</sup> *Super Joannem*, Cap. V, lect. IX: "nam Christus est naturale Dei Verbum; omne autem verbum a Deo inspiratum, est quaedam participate similitudo illius."

<sup>128</sup> Jn. 1:14, 16-17.

<sup>129</sup> S.T., IIIa, Q. 62, a. 5.

<sup>130</sup> St. Thomas speaks beautifully on this point in his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, cap. I, lect. 1, (n. 15 in Marietti).

<sup>131</sup> *Mystici Corporis*, n. 50 (emphasis added); cf. St. Augustine on the Harmony of the Gospels I, 35, 54 (PL XXXIV, p. 1070).

Here we are confronted with a difficulty. For we are investigating inspiration as it took place in the formation of the Old Testament. But at the time of the writing of the Old Testament, the Incarnation had not yet happened. Therefore, it seems impossible to hold that the humanity of Christ was the principal instrument from Whom divine truth flowed into the sacred authors of the Old Testament. A similar objection arises with respect to the grace available through the sacraments of the Old Law. In response to this difficulty, St. Thomas replies:

Now nothing hinders that which is subsequent in point of time from causing movement even before it exists in reality, insofar as it exists in an act of the soul: thus, the end, which is subsequent in point of time, moves the agent insofar as it is apprehended and desired by him. On the other hand, what does not yet actually exist does not cause movement if we consider the use of exterior things. Consequently, the efficient cause cannot in point of time come into existence after causing movement, as does the final cause.<sup>132</sup>

From this it follows that the humanity of Christ could not have been an efficient cause of the truth imparted into the souls of the sacred authors of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, this does not prevent the Old Testament Scriptures from bearing a likeness to the Incarnate Word. For by the divine inspiration, the Incarnate Word could be made present by way of intention in the souls of the sacred authors.<sup>133</sup>

Here let us return to the question we asked earlier: what if God intends to signify multiple realities with the same words? If the human author intends only one of these meanings, this would seem sufficient to guarantee that every word of Scripture has both a human and a divine author. But in the hypothetical case where God might intend multiple literal senses of the same word, there is in fact one word materially, but multiple words formally. And so, formally speaking, there would

<sup>132</sup> S.T., IIIa, Q. 62, a. 6.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. S.T., IIa-IIae, Q. 171, a. 6, ad 1.

still be a word or words in Scripture which do not have a meaning intended by a human author.<sup>134</sup>

We have already noted above that this position is not fitting since it makes the human author an author *per accidens* with regard to the meaning which he did not intend. For if the words are taken according to the meaning which is not intended by the sacred human author, insofar as these words signify the unintended meaning, they will have only a divine author. And thus, there will be words of God without being the words of men. Put another way, they will be the words of God in themselves, but the words of man only by happenstance. We said above that this was not befitting the divine economy since God wills to employ creatures in such a way that they are themselves true causes. However, the deeper insight into the nature of the Scriptures through the mystery of the Incarnation provides a more profound reason for the need for every intended meaning of Scripture to have a united human and divine intention. For the sacred Scriptures must bear a likeness to their cause, the Incarnate Word. Now a thing is said to be like another when there is the same relation among its elements. But the elements of the word of God (i.e., each word of the sacred Scripture) are the human and divine intentions, while the elements of the Incarnate Word are the human nature and the divine nature. The human nature and divine nature of the Incarnate Word are related such that, although they differ in essence, the human nature exists by the divine act of existence (*esse*). And therefore, there is one *esse* of the Incarnate Word. In like manner, there is only a single act of existence of each word of Scripture, although there are two intentions for each word. But a sign (in this case, a word) is given existence (*esse*) as such by the intention of the author.

<sup>134</sup> Here we must allow for the possibility of a certain unity of analogy through which it might be said that words having different, yet analogously related meanings, have "one" sense. Cf. St. Thomas, *In II Sent.*, D. 12, Q. 1, a. 2, ad 7. This point merits further investigation, but is beyond the scope of this article.

For the intention of the signifier unites the sign to the thing signified: a vocal sound or written symbol comes to be a sign of a thing precisely when it is intended to be such. Therefore, the human and divine intentions, while remaining essentially human and divine, ought to terminate in a word which has the same act of existence. The human and divine intentions are distinct because they differ in subject and in mode of existence. Nevertheless, the human and divine intentions can be said to be the same when, with the human intention subordinated to the divine intention, the object which is formally intended to be signified is the same *in substance*. That is to say, the truth or reality signified is the same in both cases, even if the divine intention perceives and intends various circumstances surrounding this truth or reality, which circumstances were not perceived or intended by the sacred author (which would necessarily be the case given the mode of existence of the divine intention). And so the words of Scripture, while having a single act of existence, can be said to be fully human and fully divine only when the divine intention and the human intention are directed to the same object. Nevertheless, the divine intention does this in a divine way, while the human intention does this in a human way which is completely subordinated to the divine intention. Because of these different modes of intending, the words of Scripture remain both fully divine and fully human.<sup>135</sup>

From the analogy of Scripture to the Incarnation, it also

<sup>135</sup> This more profound analysis of the nature of Sacred Scripture and its relation to the Incarnation manifests why the Christological errors of Theodore of Mopsuestia (dividing the human and divine persons in Christ) are essentially linked with his hermeneutical errors (dividing the human and divine intentions in the Old Testament prophecies of Christ), and why both errors were condemned in the same Council. It is not surprising that current trends to deny that Christ was signified in the Old Testament according to the literal sense come at the same time that attempts to reassert the human personality of Christ are prevalent in modern Christology. This is not a mere historical accident, but a unified theological position that strikes at the heart of revelation.

becomes apparent why the Scriptures must be obscure. For in the Incarnation, the fullness of the Divinity resides in bodily form. And so it is the true God and not a mere representation who is revealed in Christ: through the Incarnation the *substance* of God is revealed. Yet since flesh and blood are not capable of manifesting perfectly the reality of God, this revelation of the Godhead must remain obscure. God is both revealed and hidden. In like manner, no matter how perfectly enlightened a sacred human author is, he cannot intend everything which God intends through the words of sacred Scripture. Yet what God intends to reveal is intended by the sacred human author *in substance*. In the Old Testament, there is an additional reason for the obscurity of God's self-revelation. For God had not yet willed to reveal Himself fully. There is a parallel in the very life of Christ here, Who willed to live and work in obscurity until the day of his manifestation at the Jordan when He began His public life.

Conclusion:

Our consideration of the presence of Christ in Old Testament according to the interpretive principles of St. Thomas Aquinas has examined the question of whether Christ was signified according to the intention of the sacred human authors of the Old Testament both dialectically and demonstratively, using principles proper to the science of Sacred Theology. We have thus shown with certitude precisely why it must be true that the authors of the Old Testament indeed intended to signify Christ by their prophetic words. A careful analysis of the sources of revelation reveals that the reference point of every divine revelation is Christ Jesus. God has willed that all revelation be through and of Christ since, in Himself, the Incarnate Word is the ultimate and perfect Word of God revealing Himself. Thus, whatever is revealed by God about Himself must be found in Christ. This is eminently true of the sacred Scriptures, which have Christ as their exemplar. In the

words of Hugh of St. Victor, "All sacred Scripture is but one book, and that one book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ."<sup>136</sup> Christ was at the heart of that which was revealed to and through the sacred authors of the Old Testament.

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<sup>136</sup> *De Arca Noe*, 2, 8: PL 176, 642.