

## Newman and Bouyer on Sacrifice and Apologetics

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The classical modern, scientific approach to apologetics enshrined in seminary manuals, both Catholic and Protestant, came under much attack in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Typically broken up, in its Catholic form, into three domains, *demonstratio religiosa, christiana, and catholica*, it sought, first of all, to establish the existence and nature of God as well as the possibility of his revelation, second, to show the fact of Christian revelation, and, third, to prove that the Catholic Church is the one true Church of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Holding that Christian dogma is indemonstrable, it laid forth what was considered to be the condition (though not cause) for Christian faith in “motives of credibility,” that is, demonstrable signs of God’s infallible authority in such realities as prophecies, physical miracles, the moral miracle of the Church, and the moral integrity of Christ. It was thought that attention to these signs could show that the act of faith, which comes to us as a gift of the Holy Spirit and not as the conclusion of a demonstration, is, though a gift of grace, not unreasonable or rationally unwarranted.

The most penetrating and constructive critique of this classical modern approach was put forth by Hans Urs von Balthasar in his *Glory of the Lord*, where it was harshly rebuked for having parceled off, in demonstrations of credibility, the content of faith (*fides quae*) from the subjective act of faith (*fides qua*).<sup>2</sup> Balthasar thought this bifurcation between object and subject was in fact a common flaw found in both neo-Scholastic and transcendentalist apologetics. Each, in his view, split apart the figure of Christ in his phenomenality from the Gospel that he preached as taught by the Church in its dogmatic tradition. The neo-Scholastics upheld dogma in its abiding transcendence but failed to see its essential connection to the form of

<sup>1</sup> See Avery Dulles, in *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), pp. 203-05. This approach was established in Catholic seminaries and universities with 18<sup>th</sup> century neo-Scholasticism.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vincent Holzer, “*Une contre-apologétique: Du jugement de crédibilité rationnelle suffisante à l’“évidence objective” de la Révélation,*” in *Communio*, XXXIX, 1-2, (2014): 55-71. I draw on Holzer to set up the common flaw that Balthasar locates in the manuals and transcendental apologetics. This is well-summarized by Balthasar himself in *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D.C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), pp. 15-60.

God revealed in Christ. The transcendentalists, for their part, located the content of the Gospel in the fleeting historical experience of the human subject. Neither thought that the form of Christ reveals the eternal triune glory so as to be perceived. Balthasar argued in contrast to this that in the human form of Christ the light of the Gospel in its Trinitarian fullness shines forth, that the radiance of the triune God is exuded through the human face of God and can be perceived there in an objective act of faith, and that the totality of the Christic form, including its full theological meaning, is not foreign to apologetics or “fundamental theology.” On the basis of this understanding of the believer’s perception of Christ, Balthasar erected what is in fact a fully theological “counter-apologetics” that elevates theological logic beyond the conditions of possibility established by separated philosophies or by the logic of the manuals and into the domain of transcendent, unexpected, “impossible” charity, showing forth God’s unforeseen and surpassing triune love in the Christic *Gestalt* in its totality. He thereby recast the relationship between fundamental theology and dogmatic theology, seeing them as integrally connected. The task of fundamental theology in this project was to develop a theological account of our faith-perception of Christ, with a decided primacy given to the *fides quae* through which the *fides qua* breaks forth.<sup>3</sup>

One way of understanding Balthasar’s “fundamental theology” is to see it as a way of clarifying the meaning of the Christian understanding of God in a culture that has become either a-theist (that is to say, indifferent to religious claims) or anti-theist specifically with respect to Christianity.<sup>4</sup> This clarification necessarily requires presentation of the Christ of dogma, who cannot be placed under a bushel if we are to reach the men and women of our day. The “anti-theism” referred to here is that of the Nietzschean Anti-Christ, for whom the Bacchic Dionysus must, for the good of the human race, overcome the Crucified in a struggle in which followers of the Crucified will find that their proofs for the existence of a generally theist deity are a useless weapon and that the straitjackets of modern philosophical conditions of possibility should not be taken to be inevitable. Balthasar, understanding the demands of apologetics in this cultural situation, brought to human perception, with unparalleled thickness of description, the beauty of the merciful, triune love shown forth in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the counterattraction and anti-dote to the boredom or even violence of Nietzschean eternal return.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), pp. 27-33.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jean-Yves Lacoste, *From Theology to Theological Thinking*, trans. W. Chris Hackett (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014), pp. 86-7.

Balthasar was not alone in this endeavor. His work was in fact foreshadowed, at least to some extent, by John Henry Newman (among others), and he was accompanied in it by Louis Bouyer (among others). Newman and Bouyer were the two greatest Oratorian theologians of the past two hundred years, and the two theologians, in their shared endeavor and familial connection to Balthasar, that I shall make the focus of the present study. They carry out a task akin to Balthasar's but perhaps more centered than he on the properly "religious" glory and radiance of Christ's sacrificial form. A shared emphasis emerges between them that brings sacramental theology and with it dogmatic theology as a whole into closer conjunction with fundamental theology than was typical in the modern age. I shall suggest in this study that Bouyer develops Newman's moral and aesthetic theological apologetics of religion in a manner that clarifies the criteria of "true sacrifice" essential in perceiving the attractive radiance of the person of Christ. Bouyer, like Newman before him, demonstrates, in a phenomenological way, with respect to the cultural connections of ritual, myth, philosophy, and the problem of evil, the sacrificial love of the only God who, in a world of competing gods, of ideologies and idols, is worthy of our adoration. Bouyer adds to Balthasar's immense project a clarification on the problem of evil as a theme in fundamental theology as well as an important theological transformation of ritual and myth anthropologies that so deeply affected 20<sup>th</sup> century culture at large—artistic, philosophical, and literary. I shall organize the presentation in three sections, first exploring Newman on sacrifice and apologetics, second, expounding Bouyer's corrective development of Newman on this front, and, third, setting forth briefly, but systematically, the criteria that Bouyer's work implies are so essential to establish that Christian praise and religious sacrifice consummates rather than decimates our freedom.

## I.

A famous passage from Newman's *Apologia* forms the basis for understanding both Newman and Bouyer on the question of sacrifice and apologetics. Speaking of his encounter with the philosophy (rather than theology) of the great 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century Alexandrian theologians, Newman once said:

Some portions of their teaching, magnificent in themselves, came like music to my inward ear, as if the response to ideas, which, with little external to encourage them, I had cherished so long. These were based on the mystical or sacramental principle, and spoke of the various Economies or dispensations of the Eternal. I understood these passages to mean that the exterior world, physical and historical, was but

the manifestation to our senses of realities greater than itself. Nature was a parable: Scripture was an allegory: pagan literature, philosophy, and mythology, properly understood, were but a preparation for the Gospel. The Greek poets and sages were in a certain sense prophets; for “thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given.”<sup>5</sup>

Newman explains that his own approach to the rational warrant of faith draws on this sacramental understanding of creation and history as enriched by his reading of Joseph Butler’s seminal work of apologetics, *The Analogy of Religion: Natural and Revealed* (1736). Newman identifies two particular principles in this book as crucial to the development of the whole of his own thought. The first principle is that the universe is pervaded by types and symbols of the invisible world, and the second is that it is the rule of probability in concrete rational inferences that serves as the guide of human practical judgment. Newman says of the first principle that it is based on the idea of “an analogy between the separate works of God,”<sup>6</sup> which implies a sacramental connection between “natural history” and “sacred history,” or, perhaps more accurately, between “naturally sacred history” and “supernaturally sacred history.” Both of these principles are developed in full in Newman’s *A Grammar of Assent* but were operative in other works of his such as *Arians of the Fourth Century* and *The Idea of a University*.

It is most fruitful for our purposes to focus on *Grammar*, particularly chapter 10, where Newman puts forth a sacramental “demonstration” for the credibility of the Christian claim that aligns with our overall topic of consideration. Significantly, Newman holds that this demonstration is highly personal or individual, in that it refers to the lines of reasoning by which he is able to justify his own decision to believe the Gospel. Given his famous and influential focus on the irreducible concreteness of practical reason, and his forceful arguments with respect to the insufficiency of mathematical modes of demonstration in humanistic inquiry, it is no surprise that Newman can say that when it comes to the evidences proper to religion, metaphysics, or ethics, “egotism is true modesty.”<sup>7</sup> Newman’s apologetical approach is, in alignment with the Church Fathers, both confession and defense of the faith. His apologetics in *Grammar* is of a piece with his earlier confession of faith in *Apologia*. He does in both of these give reason for the hope that is within him, but he does not mean for the confessional line of evidence that he lays down in *Grammar* (or in the *Apologia*, for that matter) to be without

<sup>5</sup> Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Norton Critical Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 300.

universal appeal, for he recognizes that there are many who might have followed the same course of reasoning as he, and that there are those who share his fundamental premises, although they may not have yet followed through the train of evidences and reasoning that he will develop. These premises have to do with accepting the evidences of “natural religion,” and one cannot, according to Newman, without proper attention to these, enter into meaningful consideration of the Christian claim. Newman stresses that Christianity is the “completion and supplement” of natural religion and even, as he makes bold to say, of “previous revelations,” *not* the supersession or contradiction of these.<sup>8</sup> Christian revelation does indeed miraculously intervene in the course of history, but it does not “dispense with nature,” and its own particular evidences are meaningless without consecrating the course of reasoning out of which they developed.<sup>9</sup>

Newman gives a sort of genealogical phenomenology of natural religion, anticipating what Bouyer will later do, getting at the “primitive form” of religion, its essence as he sees it.<sup>10</sup> He delineates individual, social, and cosmic dimensions of the religious reality, as Bouyer will also later do. The individual dimension of religious experience refers to conscience, the phenomenological description of which is the basis for Newman’s reasoned confession of faith. Conscience, for Newman, is a moral consciousness, the deepest stratum of human knowledge, which teaches us, on the basis of myriad “instinctive perceptions,” of the existence and attributes of God. Newman’s apologetic emphasizes from the start the omnipresence of evil in human existence and in the course of nature, and the God whose existence he leads us toward is the God who interacts with us precisely in our historical fallen-ness, the God, that is, of religion. This God of precisely natural religion is, according to the attestation of conscience, a judge who is angry with us and threatens punishment. It should be pointed out that Newman’s phenomenology of the “primitive form” of religion is meant to get to the perception of the divine that he thinks is common to humanity prior to the advent of philosophical and civilizational distortions, and that he thinks primordial religiosity stresses the dark side of human existence in relationship to God. The man of “primitive religion” knows of his sinfulness, of his need for reconciliation, and he experiences religion, though needed, as a heavy burden or yoke, because he comes through it face to face with the Divine Judge.

Thus, for Newman, when it comes to the social dimension of religion—its doctrine, its external religious rites, its devotions—the

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 302-3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>10</sup> This expression is taken from Bouyer who understands it in the phenomenological sense meant by Husserl. See Bouyer, *The Invisible Father*, trans. Hugh Gilbert (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1999), p. 7.

need for atonement is given expression. The institution of religious priesthood is found everywhere, as well as sacrificial rites of atonement. Religious practice enshrines the human religious understanding that God wishes to exact justice for our sins, and that he must be placated, or that his justice must find an efficacious substitutionary victim. Newman realizes how harsh this kind of talk sounds to modern ears, and it would have been no less abrasive to the sensibilities of the people of Victorian England whom he taught and to whom he preached than to people in our own times. Indeed, this part of Newman's *Grammar* has been criticized in an especially harsh manner. It can be said in Newman's defense that he is uniquely sensitive to the darkness inherent to the system of the world, a sensitivity that led Bouyer himself to acknowledge that Newman saw "the dark face of the cosmos more fearsomely than perhaps any Christian thinker of any time."<sup>11</sup> Sin and evil abound, Newman realized, and these must be accounted for and healed. Yet, Newman held (quite realistically), God is so often present to us in the system of the world only in absence, and evil might seem to be insuperable. "Natural religion," in one aspect at least, is the individual and social expression of this basic human experience of the apparently implacable presence of the dark side of reality, of God's apparent absence in our daily lives, and of our need for a better life in closer relationship with him.

In all of this, Newman insists that there is a brighter side to natural religion, for, however deeply embedded "*homo religiosus*" understands evil to be in the system of the world, as well as God's apparent absence, he holds out the hope that evil will in the end be extricated. Natural religion expresses both need and hope, embodying within its practices a sense that though man exists in an extreme condition of misery and need, God is infinitely good and will in the end make himself present through an act of deliverance. Given religious humanity's perception or understanding of God's infinite goodness, there exists in its collective heart a sense of "antecedent probability," or anticipation, that God will set things right. One way of understanding Newman's meaning here is to connect his discussion of the credentials of divine revelation to the anticipations of religious humanity as evidenced in the presence of individual and ritual sacrifice. Following Bishop Butler, Newman in fact understands sacrifice—defined here as meritorious, substitutionary satisfaction of punishment or of sins—as a ubiquitous presence in the entirety of our experience. Quoting Butler:

[T]he world is a constitution or system, whose parts have a mutual reference to each other; and . . . there is a scheme of things gradually

<sup>11</sup> Bouyer, *Cosmos: The World and the Glory of God*, trans. Pierre de Fontnouvelle (Petersham, MA : St. Bede's Publications, 1988), p. 205.

carrying on, called the course of nature, to the carrying on of which God has appointed us, in various ways, to contribute. And in the daily course of natural providence, it is appointed that innocent people should suffer for the faults of the guilty. Finally, indeed and upon the whole, every one shall receive according to his personal deserts; but during the progress, and, for ought we know, even in order to the completion of this moral scheme, vicarious punishments may be fit, and absolutely necessary. We see in what variety of ways one person's sufferings contribute to the relief of another; and being familiarized to it, men are not shocked with it.<sup>12</sup>

Newman clarifies that the system of meritorious sacrificial suffering of which Butler speaks is present in a husband's self-sacrifice for his wife or a mother's for her children or a soldier's for his country. The examples could be multiplied indefinitely. These are "natural facts" in the system of the world, but they are consecrated on the religious plane socially in sacrificial rites of atonement and individually in the ascetical detachment and self-offering of the greatest of the devotees of the religions, whose lives of austerity and self-affliction are thought to gain blessings for their people. It is on this level that Newman sees the good side of natural religion: its reverence for purity, the honor it extends toward ascetics, the concomitant high regard that it places on sacred duty and hospitality, as well as articulating a sense of right and wrong.

Revealed religion, in the Newmanian view, is purification and elevation of this naturally religious sense of the essential importance of sacrifice. There are a multitude of individual signs that point to the presence of the divine in the Christian experience: its ancient continuity with the Abrahamic covenant, its universality, its fulfillment of the prophecies of ancient Judaism—albeit by surpassing their expectations and reordering them around the person of Christ, while also issuing forth its own prophecies with respect to the Second Coming. However, for Newman, the most convincing sign of the divine presence in Christian religion is the zeal with which Christians have dedicated their lives to conformity to Christ and to preaching him in whose Image they have been transformed. The early Christians were able to face martyrdom as they did because they held the Image of Christ in their hearts. They knew him as a living presence in their lives and understood his power over the terror and agony of death. Newman's moving recounting of the lives of the martyrs near the end of *Grammar* points to the need for Christian apologetics to be Christocentric, as was true of the living apologetics practiced by these early martyrs. At the same time, it shows forth the consecration and elevation that Christianity effects with respect to natural religion,

<sup>12</sup> Newman, *A Grammar of Assent*, p. 316. The quotation is taken from Butler's *Analogy*, II, p. 5.

for the Christian martyrs are the transfiguring heirs of the sacrificial, ascetical devotees of the pagan religions. Moreover, at the end of *Grammar*, this elevating consecration has a social dimension in the sacred liturgy of the Church. The credentials of Christian faith are found not only in the testimonies of the early Christians but in the powerful meaning of the Church's corporate life of worship. This is to say that the Christian faith is a living reality, and one can encounter its divine credentials by reflecting on the universal celebration of the Mass:

At this very day its rites and ordinances are continually eliciting the active interposition of that Omnipotence in which the religion long ago began. First and above all is the Holy Mass, in which He who once died for us upon the Cross, brings back and perpetuates, by His literal presence in it, that one and the same sacrifice which cannot be repeated.<sup>13</sup>

For Newman, the universality of the Christian claim is itself a marvel, backed up by its unparalleled spiritual (rather than military or political) transformation of universal human history, in spite of the many dark aspects of the Church's own history, of which Newman is well aware. The meaning of its corporate life of praise and practice attests to the "true sacrifice" of the Cross in the Eucharist, for which religious humanity had ever longed. The sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist consecrates and elevates the basic religious need at the heart of our tormented being. Newman invites us, with this chapter, to consider true sacrifice as the highest credential of the Christian claim, elucidated by a focus that has become self-consciously liturgical, or, one might say, "mystagogical," a focus that moves us in the direction of integration of fundamental theology and dogmatic theology.

## II.

This is the very direction that Louis Bouyer will take in his own theological *oeuvre*, bringing the insights of Newman onto a new plane, modifying them, to be sure, and, in the end, joining together fundamental theology and dogmatic theology in his works around a modern catechesis that is at once mystagogical and academic. It should be said that Bouyer was a non-specialist scholar of Newman's work, which he began reading at least as early as his teenage years in the original English. He discovered Newman through Henri Bremond's earlier book on him, and he would later write two books on Newman as well as articles and book introductions. Bouyer's spiritual biography of Newman shifted the perception that was held of Newman

<sup>13</sup> *Grammar of Assent*, p. 376.



on the continent away from Bremond's rendering of Newman as a radical subjectivist or solipsist. Seeing Newman instead as an exemplar of traditional Christian piety, Bouyer's study helped to pave the way for Newman's eventual beatification.<sup>14</sup> Bouyer's own work is decisively shaped by Newman, oftentimes explicitly and even more often implicitly so.

One area in which Bouyer's work is implicitly aligned with Newman is the relation of Catholic religion to "natural religion." Newman is not the only influence on Bouyer in this regard (one should point especially to Dom Odo Casel as well), and Bouyer is, of course, in many ways his own man, shaping his sources with his own synthetic mind. On the level of apologetics, however, there are certain alignments between the two Oratorian theologians that almost certainly give evidence that Bouyer is directly indebted to Newman in this area. Bouyer's work shows forth explicit respect for Newman's "antecedent probability," operating in the line of Newman's analysis of the interplay between abstract and concrete thought, stressing the primacy of real apprehension and real assent, and, most importantly for our purposes, recognizing the perennial religious importance of sacrifice in the system of the world, which, for Bouyer as for Newman, is the living connecting link between the "natural" and the "supernatural."

I want to focus on, to start with, one of Bouyer's most mature and systematic reflections on these themes, his book *The Invisible Father*, the second volume of his second trilogy in systematics, on the doctrine of God. It is both a suggestive treatise on the Christian understanding of God (dogmatic theology) and a showing forth of the credentials of what Christians claim to be divine revelation (apologetics or fundamental theology). As with Newman's *Grammar*, there is for Bouyer's *The Invisible Father* a domain of "antecedent probability," but for Bouyer the emphasis does not fall on natural, meritorious substitutionary proto-atonement but on man's natural desire for communion with transcendent reality. Like Newman, Bouyer analyzes religion with respect to its individual, social, and cosmic manifestations, but, unlike Newman, he has later developments in anthropology to help him along, although he transforms the oftentimes skeptical, reductive interpretations of these in the purifying perspective of his unique, liturgically biblical faith-phenomenology.

*The Invisible Father* begins with an analysis of our discovery of God as it is really, existentially achieved, not first and foremost through philosophical argumentation or natural theology but through the course of religious history and culture. Bouyer analyzes therein,

<sup>14</sup> Bouyer, *Newman: A Spiritual Biography* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011). First published in Paris in 1952.

in a phenomenological mode, the movement from embodied ritual, sacrificial experience of God to its mythic articulation and finally to its logical consummation in both philosophy and the incarnation of the Eternal Logos.<sup>15</sup> There is, for Bouyer, an open dialectic at work. This openness is made possible through the inspired intuition of religious prophets throughout the ages, both within and outside of the covenant of Abraham. The world's religious "prophets" would point, in the midst of the degradations of magic and idolatry, to the true meaning of God's love for creation. According to Bouyer's analysis, humanity, in its discovery of the power of the rite of sacrifice, lapses into the distortion of magic, or the tendency to think that it has effective power over the rites that form human community. It thinks that it can manipulate these according to its whims and thereby control the gods and the cosmos. Myth, according to Bouyer, arises in the context of ritual to assert the power of the gods over the rites and the cosmos, but it falls into its own distortions, because, while it enables man to understand himself as the very image of the divine, it tends to project this image, in its fallen-ness, too much back onto its source. The logos of philosophy carries out the work of demythologization in that it purifies our understanding of the divine of admixture with our own foibles, but even it runs a risk: that of turning our thought of God into a dead abstraction. Only the incarnate Logos, made known to us finally throughout the age of the Church in the sacrificial action of the Eucharistic memorial, enables us to discover the God that humanity had ever sought, however confusedly, in its ancient religious traditions.

Sacrificial action is indeed, for Bouyer as for Newman, the "primitive" religious fact. However, Bouyer stresses a more positive dimension of sacrifice: the deeply experiential sense that it inculcates in humanity that communion with the divine is possible, not through a strict divine accounting of merit and substitution, but through the very gift of our embodiment. Sacrifice is first of all the culminating communion of the festal, sacred meal. In this meal the sacred is enacted (*sacrum facere*), through renewal or rediscovery of the gift of life, which is received and shared in the feast:

Underlying such an eating, we find those pregnant ideas of communion and love that will prove so susceptible to subsequent elaboration. Such love is in one sense a desire for self-enrichment, from growth and escape from one's own limits. This ultimately means giving, self-giving even though such is possible only within, so to speak, the original gift of life. And it is precisely this gift that the meal provides, a gift requiring our consent and that consent being impossible apart from our participation.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See *The Invisible Father*, all of part one.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Bouyer's phenomenological interpretation of sacrifice sees it as self-gift, or, perhaps more accurately, as the act of self-giving in which the primordial givenness of self is at last fully recognized. Death and destruction are not the realities of primary significance in sacrifice. These dour accompaniments to it are not its primary factor. It is not the slaughtering of a victim that is the essence of sacrifice but self-giving—openly, consciously, “within . . . the original gift of life.” Sacrifice can then take a communal, festal, Eucharistic form: it is, in its highest essence, joyous and life-giving. The oblation of sacrifice is for the sake of this highest end.

Bouyer holds that it is through the sacrificial rendering of the cosmos that the idea of God or the gods emerges, although these ideas are secondary to a primary, embodied experience of unity in the ritual action of sacrifice. God, Bouyer insists, is always present to human experience, however confusedly, as the transcendent unity of our experience—indeed, a presence, but a presence in absence. Myth, poetry, tragedy, and even philosophy arise from the sacred action of the sacrifice, a point that Bouyer insistently emphasized, in alignment with a good deal of 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropology. The cultural distortions of magic and idolatry arise from this cultic context as well, and Bouyer insists that prophetism emerges, throughout the religions of humanity, in order to burst through false or distorted images of the divine in which idolatry and magic ensnare us. Prophetic inspiration is, for Bouyer, found even in “natural religion,” which evokes Newman's statement that even “Greek poets and sages were in a sense prophets.” In *The Invisible Father*, Bouyer enumerates examples of prophecy in Egypt, India, South America, and elsewhere. Prophets arose in these diffuse cultures who wished to purify the entirety of the sacrificial, religious practices and beliefs of their place and time. Far from being anti-cultic in origin, though, the ancient prophets of the world's religions “sprang up from the heart of those liturgies which were so impressive in the deep way they persisted unchanged beneath their varied mythical drapery.”<sup>17</sup> Prophecy denounced images of the divine that denigrated its transcendence and therefore undermined its ubiquitous immanence. It rejected the inherent confusion of myths, of theology with cosmogony, of creation with the fall, and of salvation with de-creation. Prophecy in the natural religions was a quest for *logike thusia*, for rational worship, for reasonable sacrifice. Bouyer espies this desire in its cultic form in Akhenaten, Ce Acatl, and Inca religious reformers; religious philosophical prophecy is evinced in the quest of the Buddha for renewed contact with true transcendence and even more in the Socratic search for the *Summum Bonum*.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 129-30.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-1.

However, the prophets of “natural religion” were singular figures, discontinuous, and the content of their teachings did not rise up to what one finds in the history of Israel. They illumined societies but only temporarily, like flashes of lightning in the sky: “The vision peculiar to the prophet only reperussed in a confused, dream-like way on others.”<sup>19</sup> Bouyer understands the visions of these prophets to have penetrated the veil of evil in the world, for their visions would “leave everyone with a presentiment that what had hitherto been taken for real was perhaps no more than a nightmare and that morning would efface it.”<sup>20</sup> What is this but Newman’s “antecedent probability” of deliverance? Yet (and this is also Newmanian), it is only in the history of Israel

that a prophetic vision was able, little by little, to spread and develop, passing from one seer to the next, and, what is more, to take possession of the collective consciousness of the entire human community becoming, as we shall see in Christianity, not so much the vision of a community set apart as the matrix of one destined to embrace the whole world.<sup>21</sup>

Israelite prophetism is the result of the unique history of the People of God, wherein God’s universal kingship is made known to them in their historical destiny—to them alone who are given to know the God of the gods, *the* God of heaven and earth. Their discovery of the one and only universal Lord of creation and history was sudden and unprepared for, in one sense given to them all at once from the beginning with God’s establishment of covenant with Abraham, though, in another sense, progressive or developmental. The divine Word revealed himself to his people in human words, utilizing the medium of the “natural sacred,” of the rites and myths of humanity’s culturally-inherent religious matrix. If God had not done so, he could not have been known by his People. Nevertheless, the divine Word refigured these rites and myths in the process of self-revelation. One of the most significant dimensions of Bouyer’s theological phenomenology of religion is his uniquely perceptive way of bringing to light the manner in which the biblical prophetic tradition transforms the ancient sacrifices. We see this especially well summarized in the *first* volume of his trilogy on God, *The Eternal Son*.

In this book, developing some of his earlier writings, Bouyer centers the continuous line of biblical prophetism that emerges from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onward on the Jewish Passover, which transformed the springtime meal ritual of ancient cultures into a festal memorial of God’s unrepeatable historical intervention that led his people in

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Exodus out of Egypt. The Jewish Passover sacrifice enabled the People of God to experience God at last as Person, because he had initiated them into covenantal life with him. All of the other sacrifices of Israel centered on the Passover and drew their meaning from it. The entire assembly of the People of God in all its variations was an “everlasting remembrance of this covenant consistently made present again.”<sup>22</sup> Prophetic interpretation of the sacrificial centering of Jewish life led to a new and consistently developing understanding of God’s *hésèd* and of our obligations to him:

The message of the prophetic teaching, about sacrifice, especially the teaching of Isaiah coming after Amos and Hosea, is that sacrificial offerings are meaningless if they do not express our faith in the Word which demands obedience, conformity and abandonment without reserve to God’s will, and a desire to be one with Him in *hésèd*, in trusting love, in compassion and justice, in a word, in that perfect consecration of our whole life and our whole being [to] His absolute holiness.<sup>23</sup>

The prophetic experience of God’s mercy led to new sacrificial practices, to sacrifices for sin and reconciliation. Bouyer rejects the Girardian interpretation of sacrifice which centers on the scapegoat as a destructive mechanism by which penalty is transformed from the offerer of the sacrifice to its victim. Girard, associating the natural sacred with the scapegoat mechanism, sees the sacred in a drastically negative light and interprets the Christian revolution as a fundamental action of de-sacralization. Bouyer, on the other hand, understands atoning sacrifice in a biblical context to be the transfiguring perfection of the sacred in rites of sacrificial offering (though not in the scapegoat, which, in his view, always had to do with the demonic rather than the sacred), a renewed recognition that all life belongs to God and desires free return to him. Sacrifices, Bouyer says, “must signify and effect a surrender of one’s entire being.”<sup>24</sup> In the Old Testament, sacrifices point with transfigured clarity toward a divinely enacted self-gift that will at last perfect communion with God and neighbor. Sacrifice is extended to the whole life of man. It is now understood as “all suffering patiently borne.”<sup>25</sup> Expiatory suffering, especially of the innocent, emerges as a foreshadowing of the merciful God’s ultimate engagement with history in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The figure of the Suffering Servant of deuterо-Isaiah comes forth from the totality of the religious milieu of the Israelites. The

<sup>22</sup> Bouyer, *The Eternal Son*, trans. Sr. Simone Inkel and John F. Loughlin (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1978), p. 126.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> *The Eternal Son*, p. 128

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

extension of the meaning of sacrifice to the whole of human life in fact confers greater meaning and dignity on the sacrificial rites from which prophetic inspiration is nurtured. Communal sacrificial rites of praise become profounder, and Bouyer famously focuses in this respect on the *Berakah* sacrifice that, in his estimation, provides the context for the Christian Eucharist.

In Jesus Christ the divine Word now made flesh, God's re-creative action, foreshadowed in the Judaic sacrifice of praise, is effectively present from within the very marrow of history. In Jesus' acceptance of the Cross, all of his earthly life and its prefiguring in the history of Israel, is completed. The Cross is indecipherable apart from the meaning that Christ confers upon it in his Eucharistic discourse after the Last Supper—sacred meal and sacrificial Cross are interconnected in the divine action in Christ that brings to fulfillment the anticipation of the Messianic covenant foreshadowed in the *Berakah*, itself transfiguring the sacrifices of natural religion. As Bouyer says in an earlier book:

At one stroke, just as sacred and profane history meet in their common consummation at the Cross on which Jesus hung, in the great *Berakah* for the Cross, in all the eucharists which will now draw their efficacy from the living memory of the Cross, the perfect sacrifice is accomplished, perfecting the praise, the confession of the divine Name, in the definitive fiat given to His designs.<sup>26</sup>

The sacred action of the Eucharist communicates the divine action within history, the memorial efficaciously spreading forth the mercy of God to the people he has called out for a share in the divine life. The mystery of the rites of the Church's liturgical sacrifice symbolize the mystery of Christ and his Paschal sacrifice and make it present throughout time and space in the age of the Church to be consummated only in the Second Coming. We are given to see with Bouyer, in Cross and Eucharist, the true representative sacrifice that alone unlocks the meaning of all of human history, the givenness of the perfect gift by which our hearts of stone are turned into hearts of flesh, whereby we become perfectly open to God's action in us. Bouyer makes clear that it is the Eucharistic knowledge that the Son conveys of the Father's generosity that gives us our only path of access to the transcendent *hésèd*, the "sheer self-offering" of triune love that is the deepest reality of the divine life, in its rich and varied exchanges of divine personalities, in the perfect unity of a single life. The sacramental system of the Church, taken in its totality, is our means of access to this *fides quae* that communicates the *fides qua*. It gives us the totality of the form of Christ, in

<sup>26</sup> Bouyer, *Rite and Man: Natural Sacredness and Christian Liturgy*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe, S.J. (Notre Dame University Press, 1963), p. 121.

connection to the world and history in their deepest religious meaning, and, taken as a whole, might be seen to give the most convincing credentials of Christian faith—a line of reasoning that brings chapter 10 of Newman’s *Grammar* to a new level.

### III.

Dogmatic, sacramental theology and fundamental theology intertwine in the Bouyerian texts, but, even so, we might be left wondering, from what I have said, if we can isolate more rigorously a line of argumentation that, without losing contact with the *fides quae*, can be utilized in a philosophical or apologetical context. In fact, Bouyer signals the direction he would recommend in *The Invisible Father*. Bouyer’s discussions in this book of the traditional and modern proofs for the existence of God can help us to clarify the preceding sections of the present study and show more precisely how Bouyer’s thought is capable of being opened up to philosophical and apologetical dialogue.

His discussion of these proofs is one more sign of his deep indebtedness to Newman, for the argument from conscience that Newman developed is especially decisive for Bouyer. There are, Bouyer argues, three general types of proof for the existence of God: cosmological proofs, moral proofs (including Newman’s proof from conscience), and transcendental proofs. These fit a tripartite structuring of human experience that reminds us of chapter 10 of Newman’s *Grammar*, because with these three categories Bouyer isolates cosmic, social, and individual dimensions of human experience that, especially when taken together, enable us to affirm the existence of God. However, Bouyer takes these arguments less as demonstrations for the existence of God than as clarifications or attempts to understand what it is we mean when we speak of God. In the whole context of Bouyer’s thought, it is clear that he sees these proofs as important to help us reason concerning what we mean specifically as Christians when we speak of the God of Christian belief. This, as I shall return to shortly, enables us to see how Bouyer’s “fundamental theology” is a response precisely to the situation of a-theism or anti-theism that I spoke of in the introduction of this study.

Proofs for the existence of God, as every other profound dimension of human culture, are ultimately rooted in ritual and myth. Bouyer can draw on much anthropological data to affirm this claim. Yet, for Bouyer, philosophy possesses normativity that ritual anthropologists or social scientists may not grant it, for, he holds, if myth purifies our understanding of ritual, philosophy or theology purifies our understanding of myth. These proofs have, for Bouyer, a demonstrative probity. Still, they are only most satisfactorily deployed when they are taken together and utilized with overt connection to their ritual

or mythic basis. Bouyer urges the Christian theologian specifically to reconnect to or find anew the sedimented foundation of his reasoning in a Eucharistic or liturgical reading of Scripture, clarified with the resources of modern scriptural and religious science. If Plato could only ultimately communicate an effective and realistic communion with the gods to his hearers by pointing back to the myths and rites of the mystery religions, so the Christian theologian or philosopher has to work to draw the initiate of philosophy or theology into the context of the living, baptismal, and Eucharistic matrix of the Church. In an academic disquisition in the modern age, this sort of initiation requires a historical-phenomenological demonstration of the meaningfulness of the mystery of Christ made present in the Church's rites.

Moral proofs do indeed take center stage for Bouyer, because, even though they lack objective rigor by comparison to cosmological proofs, he holds that they provide valid criteria for analyzing the data of experience that is made available to us in the rites and myths. Cosmological arguments, in their best form, articulated by Christians, Jews, and Muslims, purify overly naïve, anthropomorphic or literalist renderings of the existence and attributes of God. However, they tend to encourage an overly abstract conceptualism, and they require correction and supplementation, especially in that the other approaches remind us that the God of our deepest, lived understanding is no mere concept but the personal God who alone can both elicit and requite, in a surpassing manner, our deepest longing.

Bouyer would have us renew the Augustinian heritage.<sup>27</sup> Augustine himself had recognized that *Beatitudo* alone can fulfill our noblest moral desire. Newman, moving along this track, focused on the call of conscience to duty, to the voice of the Person within our deepest moral consciousness, who is other to us but makes known to us the highest personal Good toward which our thoughts and actions must always be oriented if we are to be fully human. Blondel sought to extend this line of argument by connecting our search for ultimate fulfillment with the whole of our reality, with our action, and above all our prayer. It is surely true for Augustine, Newman, and Blondel that only the implicit recognition of the existence of a higher, undetermined freedom can move us ever forward in our search for *Beatitudo*, for the perfection of our moral endeavor. Fundamental theology, understood in this line of thought, readies us for encounter with, as Bouyer himself says, "supreme and supremely personal reality."<sup>28</sup> It opens us to the creative event in history. The "personalism" of this focus leaves us far from any "onto-theology." The "supreme

<sup>27</sup> *The Invisible Father*, pp. 66-74.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.



personal reality” of whom he speaks is transcendent Person and not merely “Supreme Being.”

The moral proofs, in fact, remaining in touch with the drama of personal freedom, of the human quest for fulfilled existence in personal encounter, keep us healthily tethered to essential themes of narrative and myth, including the very tragedy inherent to our existence. For Bouyer, no less than for Newman, reasoning about God can put forth a compelling figure of God only if it takes account of the dark side of history. An operative and explicated understanding of conscience will not abstract from our historical situation. An essential task of fundamental theology would be to help us realize that the problem of evil admits of no merely speculative solution. There is a pointedly aesthetic dimension in this. The theologian and philosopher have to become a bit like the artist, who, as Bouyer says, strives “to puncture boldly the opacity of the present world”<sup>29</sup> in search of the lost divine presence. The Christian theologian or philosopher, through the instrumentality of proofs for God’s existence, reaches to a highly exalted understanding of God, but this makes all the more troubling the existence of evil in the world. It is precisely with this heightened problematic in mind that he must think through and present the theological and sacramental meaning of the person and mission of Christ.

Nietzsche thought that pagan religion faced this evil square on, embracing “life itself, its eternal fruitfulness and recurrence,” its “torment,” “destruction,” and “will to annihilate.” The ritual and myth anthropologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Bouyer utilized call into question Nietzsche’s portraiture of pagan religiosity and align more with Newman. “Eternal return,” in this alternative view, is more Platonic, an expression of desire for communion with the divine by escape from the terrors of history, not simply or only by cruel alignment with these terrors. Christ, in the sacrament of his Cross and Resurrection, in fact redeems history itself and thereby consecrates our freedom, uplifting it from violence and the will to power and drawing through it all of cosmic materiality into his archetypal, Parousial presence. The “meaning” of the Christian God is unveiled in the midst of history in all of its cultural interconnections, and the theologian is well served to bring together as many of these as possible in order to give access to the form of the One who, through his Paschal Mystery, transfigures freedom, making it effective and salvific, outside of which we have hoped for better but only have really known determinism or the prospect of pure escape. Bouyer, in the line of Newman, adds to Balthasar’s project a ubiquitous religious and Eucharistic focus on the Bread of Life through whom history and

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

matter are rediscovered in their true meaning as the reflected presence of the fathomless generosity of the Person who alone gives being. Bouyer's work invites the theologian or philosopher to think the Christian transformation of the meaning of history and matter in the light of the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist, while yet remaining attentive to its real though vague analogies or anticipations as uncovered by the ritual and myth anthropologies. In other words, Bouyer invites the theologian to enter philosophical disputation in the manner of the patristic and modern theologies and philosophies of *vera religio*, though with conversational context transformed by the imposing shadow of Balthasar's famous trilogy. For Bouyer, "true religion" is powerfully signified in the Eucharistic cup of Christ, the "Holy Grail," whose beauty alone ultimately "punctures boldly the opacity of the world" in a truly life-giving manner, but also has a fully human side. The false gods of antiquity left no visible trace of themselves, certainly no universal sacramental presence, where one was very much desired. They did not sacramentally, globally unveil the nature of worthy thanksgiving. They did not uplift the human race, redeem its history, and elevate its freedom. Modern "values," however vestigially Christian they may be, accomplish little but to increase the "terror of history," so often leaving carnage in their wake, before they are replaced by new and equally dehumanizing values, like so many successive, "crepuscular idols." The radiant form of Christ, as presence made real and effective in his sacramental gifts, shows forth the only living response to evil, redemptive thanksgiving, and Newman and Bouyer, in their concrete "sacrificial apologetics," helpfully relate faith to reason on this sacramental plane.

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