




Personalist Resonances in Robert Grosseteste's Christology

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Abstract

Robert Grosseteste articulated an unusual view of Christ's death that resonates with Karol Wojtyła's personalist conception of love as self-gift. Grosseteste argued that the cause of Christ's death was not crucifixion but the active breathing forth of his spirit as he hung on the cross. Grosseteste said that in this act Christ took all the faithful into an Aristotelian friendship in which Christ is the "other self" of each one of the redeemed. As a result, the redeemed form a single mystical person with Christ. Grosseteste's account of Christ's death seems consonant with Wojtyła's personalism in three ways. First, it makes the moment of Christ's death into an active gift of self. Second, parallel to the way an ordinary self-donation depends on self-possession and results in self-discovery, Christ's self-donation depends on his power to lay down his life and results in the realization of the mystical personhood of Christ in the Church. Third, Grosseteste treats the love between the persons of the Trinity as involving the self-donation of the Son to the Father. This article contains three sections. The first two treat Grosseteste and his resonance with Wojtyła. The third draws conclusions for contemporary Christology and anthropology.

Introduction¹

Robert Grosseteste was an English polymath who lived from about 1168 to 1253. He was the first lecturer for the Franciscan *studium* at Oxford, beginning around 1229, and from 1235 to the end of his life he was the bishop of Lincoln, the largest diocese in England. Grosseteste wrote on a wide variety of topics, from the rainbow to the necessity of the Incarnation, and he was the only man of his day, as far as we know, who was both a serious theologian and a competent translator from

¹ I would like to thank my anonymous reviewers, who helped me to improve the quality and relevance of this article.

Greek into Latin. After his works fell into the hands of John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, his legacy fell on hard times, but it received a second chance in the twentieth century through the work of S. Harrison Thomson, James McEvoy, and others. Since then, scholars have begun to give Grosseteste the attention he deserves.

The present study concerns the resonance between Grosseteste's unusual view of the death of Christ and Karol Wojtyła's personalism. I have chosen the word "resonance" because, of course, personalism as a philosophy developed several centuries after Grosseteste. Yet some of the themes that would surface in personalist thought had been anticipated in various ways in the Christian tradition. This article will illustrate a particular, and unusual, instance of this.

This study will proceed in three sections. First, it will explain Robert Grosseteste's unique view of the death of Christ at some length. Then, more briefly, it will suggest three ways in which Grosseteste's view resonates with Karol Wojtyła's personalism. In the third section, it will offer a proposal for how a contemporary Christian could appropriate Robert's view – to some degree – for meaningful personalist reflection upon the death of Christ.

Robert Grosseteste on the Death of Christ

It is possible that Robert Grosseteste was the first Christian thinker in the Middle Ages to hold that the physical trauma of the crucifixion was not sufficient to cause the death of Christ, medically speaking. Instead, Christ actively laid down his life at the moment of death.² While it has been suggested that Grosseteste was the only medieval theologian to hold this view,³ I have noticed that Thomas Aquinas affirms the same view in his late *Exposition of the Apostles' Creed*.⁴ There, like

² According to Servus Gieben, the idea also appears in the *Moralitates in Evangelia*. Servus Gieben, 'Robert Grosseteste on Preaching. With the Edition of the Sermon "Ex Rerum Initiatarum" on Redemption', *Collectanea Franciscana* 37 (1967), p. 132 n.209. The manuscript location where Gieben finds Grosseteste's distinctive view in the *Moralitates* is Oxford, Trinity College, MS C. 50, fol. 234rb. The *Moralitates in Evangelia* was attributed to Grosseteste at the time when Gieben wrote, but the work is now generally considered to be spurious.

³ McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, 131. While McEvoy does say that Grosseteste appears to be the only medieval thinker to hold that Christ's wounds were not sufficient to kill him, it is possible McEvoy meant to say that the whole theory, including infinite suffering at the moment of death, was unique to Grosseteste. That may be true.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, art. 5 (ed. Taurini 1954; electronic edition by Roberto Busa and Enrique Alarcón [Fundación Tomás de Aquino, 2019], accessed September 18, 2021: <<https://www.corpusthomicum.org/csv.html>>): 'Primo quantum ad causam resurrectionis, quia alii qui surrexerunt, non surrexerunt sua virtute, sed vel Christi, vel ad preces alicuius sancti; Christus vero resurrexit propria virtute, quia non solum erat homo: sed etiam Deus, et divinitas verbi nunquam separata fuit nec ab anima nec a cor-

Grosseteste, he sees the final cry of Jesus as evidence that he was not at the point of expiring physically when he laid down his life. It is possible that Grosseteste has influenced Aquinas on this point.⁵

While Grosseteste mentions his view of Christ's death in multiple places,⁶ I will focus upon the two most significant explications. The first appears in *On the Cessation of the Laws*, and the second in his sermon *Ex Rerum Initiatarum*. In discussing both of these texts I will be following insights gained from studies by James McEvoy.⁷

Grosseteste wrote *On the Cessation of the Laws* while he was teaching the Franciscans theology at Oxford. The work bears the marks of developing from scholastic disputations, although Grosseteste has recast the material into a treatise in four parts. The passage that concerns us today appears in part 3, in the section where he is offering proofs of

pore; et ideo corpus animam, et anima corpus cum voluit resumpsit. Ioan. X, 18: *potestatem habeo ponendi animam meam, et potestatem habeo iterum sumendi eam*. Et licet mortuus fuerit, hoc non fuit ex infirmitate nec ex necessitate, sed virtute, quia sponte: et hoc patet, quia cum emisit spiritum, clamavit voce magna: quod alii morientes nequeunt, quia ex infirmitate moriuntur. Unde centurio dixit, Matth. XXVII, 54: *vere filius Dei erat iste*. Et ideo sicut sua virtute posuit animam suam, ita sua virtute recepit eam: et ideo dicitur, quia *resurrexit*, et non quod fuerit suscitatus, quasi ab alio. Psal. III, 6: *ego dormivi, et soporatus sum, et exurrexi*. In English (trans. mine): 'First, concerning the cause of the resurrection, because others who have risen did not rise by their own power but either by that of Christ or owing to the prayers of some saint. Christ, however, rose again by his own power because he was not only man but also God, and the divinity of the Word was never separated from his soul or from his body. And so, the body recovered the soul, and the soul the body, when he wished. John 10:18: "I have the power to lay down my soul, and I have the power to take it up again." And although he died, this was neither from weakness nor from necessity, but by his power. because by his will. And this is clear because when he sent forth his spirit, he cried out with a loud voice, which others who are dying cannot do because they die from weakness. Thus the centurion said, (Mt. 27:54) "Truly that man was the son of God." And so, just as by his own power he laid down his soul, so by his own power he took it back. And so it is said that he "resurrected" and not that he was resuscitated, as if by another. Psalm 3:6: "I fell asleep, and I slumbered, and I arose."'

⁵ In ST III, q.1, a.3, Aquinas seems to be aware of Grosseteste's view on the Absolute Predestination of Christ, suggesting a direct or indirect knowledge of *On the Cessation of the Laws*. Since Grosseteste's view of the death of Christ appears in the same work, it is possible that in *Exposition of the Apostles' Creed* Aquinas is following Grosseteste directly or through a mediating source. On the Parisian discussion of Grosseteste's Christology, see Brendan Case, "'More Splendid than the Sun': Christ's Flesh among the Reasons for the Incarnation", *Modern Theology* 36:4 (October, 2020), pp. 758-77.

⁶ See James McEvoy, 'Grosseteste on the Soul's Care for the Body: A New Text and New Sources for the Idea', in *Aspectus et Affectus: Essays and Editions in Grosseteste and Medieval Intellectual Life in Honor of Richard C. Dales*, ed. Gunar Freibergs (New York: AMS Press, 1993), p. 40. McEvoy, partly following Gieben (see note above), gives the following list of works that contain this idea: *Tota Pulchra Es, Super Psalterium* (or *Commentary on Psalms 1-100*), *Chasteau d'Amour, Ex Rerum Initiatarum, De Cessatione Legalium*, and *Sermo de Triplici Hierarchia*. He also notices that Grosseteste wrote a gloss on 1 Corinthians 15:55 that references the soul's care for the body apart from discussion of the death of Christ.

⁷ McEvoy, 'Soul's Care for the Body', 37-47, and McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, 130-2.

the divinity of Christ. One such proof is that he was able to separate his soul from his body by a mere act of will.

He makes two important points here. The first concerns 'the soul's care for the body', as James McEvoy and Richard Dales have called it,⁸ and the second concerns the medical facts of crucifixion. I will treat them in reverse order, discussing the medical aspect first. Grosseteste argues that a crucifixion would not have killed a young, healthy man in only three hours. Perhaps he found this idea suggested by the indication in Mark that Pilate was surprised to hear Jesus had died so quickly,⁹ or by the statement in John that he died before the other two men who were crucified with him.¹⁰ His argument, however, is not based upon such testimony but rather on the assumption that blood loss would have been the cause of death. He says he would not have lost enough blood in that period of time. In fact, a crucified individual would die of asphyxiation rather than blood loss when the individual was no longer able to raise his body and get a breath of air.¹¹ But his point is well-taken. It appears to have been an unusually quick death,¹² and, as Grosseteste also points out, the Gospels indicate that Jesus had enough strength at the end to cry in a loud voice to the Father, 'Into your hands I commend my spirit'.¹³

⁸ See McEvoy, 'Soul's Care for the Body', 37-56, and Richard Dales, 'Robert Grosseteste on the Soul's Care for the Body', in *Robert Grosseteste: New Perspectives on His Thought and Scholarship*, ed. James McEvoy, pp. 313-20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

⁹ Mark 15:42-45: 'And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.' Unless otherwise noted, scriptural quotations in the footnotes are taken from the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition. See also McEvoy, 'Soul's Care for the Body', 42.

¹⁰ John 19:32-33: 'So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.'

¹¹ D. G. Burke, 'Cross; Crucify', in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 830: 'The ultimate cause of death has been debated; generally it is considered the result of suffocation brought about by fatigue.'

¹² Burke, 'Cross', 830: 'The length of this agony was wholly determined by the constitution of the victim and the extent of the prior flogging, but death was rarely seen before thirty-six hours had passed.'

¹³ Luke 23:46, as quoted in Robert Grosseteste, *On the Cessation of the Laws* 3.6.9 (trans. Stephen Hildebrand, *The Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuation* 13 [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012], p. 190; ed. Richard C. Dales and Edward B. King, *De Cessatione Legalium*, Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi 7 [London: British Academy/Oxford University Press, 1986], p. 151): '*In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.*' Matthew 27:50 and Mark 15:37 both indicate that Jesus gave a loud cry right before his death.

Perhaps inspired by this statement, or perhaps by Jesus' statement in John that he had the power to lay down his life and the power to take it up again,¹⁴ Grosseteste says that the explanation for why Jesus died so quickly was that he actively laid down his life, something only a divine person has the power to do. This is the part about the soul's care for the body, an idea Grosseteste may have found in John Chrysostom or Avicenna.¹⁵ He says,

But most evidently, it seems to me, he showed himself to be God when he died on the cross. For to separate one's human soul from one's healthy body and heart is beyond every created power, because the soul naturally desires to be joined to its body, and it abhors nothing so much as separation from its body through death. Hence it is naturally inseparable [from the body and heart] while it is in the heart and while the vigor of life has not yet died... Therefore, it is a work proper to divine strength and creative power to separate by one's own will one's soul from one's healthy body. And so when the Lord Jesus hung on the cross with a then-healthy body and breathed forth his own spirit by will, he performed a work divine and proper to divinity alone.¹⁶

So then, Jesus did not die because of the crucifixion but through the supernatural act of breathing forth his spirit. It is worth noticing here that this is a *sui generis* act. No other embodied soul ever could, by a mere act of will, remove itself from its body. So Grosseteste is not saying that Jesus committed suicide. Every act of suicide involves destruction, or at least a forced interruption, of the vital systems of the body. Jesus did no such thing. Grosseteste rather is saying that, in this one special case, the separation of the soul from the body was not brought about by damage to the body but by a special divine act – the act of 'laying down his life' or 'breathing forth his spirit.'

In his sermon, *Ex Rerum Initiatarum*, written about ten years later (1240-1243),¹⁷ Grosseteste expounds the same view in the context of

¹⁴ John 10:17-18, quoted in note 44 below.

¹⁵ See McEvoy, 'Soul's Care for the Body', 44-6 and James McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste, Great Medieval Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 132.

¹⁶ Robert Grosseteste, *On the Cessation of the Laws* 3.6.8 (trans. Hildebrand 189; ed. Dales and King, 150-1): 'Evidentissime autem, ut mihi videtur, manifestavit se esse Deum cum moriebatur cruce; supra omnem namque potentiam creatam est a corpore humano sano animam humanam dividere, cum anima naturaliter appetat coniungi suo corpori, nichilque tamen abhorreat quam a corpore suo per mortem separationem. Unde et ipsa naturaliter inseparabilis est, dum in corde non dum defecerit calor vitalis... Divine igitur virtutis et et potentie creatricis opus proprium est animam suam a corpore suo adhuc manente sano propria voluntate deponere. Dominus itaque Ihesus cum adhuc corpore sano in cruce pendens, voluntarie proprium emisit spiritum, opus fecit divinum et divinitati soli proprium.'

¹⁷ Concerning the dating of this work, see Gieben, 'Preaching', 114, McEvoy, 'Soul's Care for the Body', 43, and James McEvoy, 'Robert Grosseteste's Theory of Human Nature with the Text of His Conference *Ecclesia Sancta Celebrat*', *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 47 (1980), p. 137.

redemption, deepening the significance of his doctrine.¹⁸ Again, there are two important points. Taking a cue from Anselm of Canterbury,¹⁹ Grosseteste believes that the God-man must make satisfaction proportional to the debt of human sin. For Grosseteste, Jesus did this not by suffering a pain of infinite duration but by a pain of intense bitterness. Consequently, he needs the pain of the passion somehow to exceed infinitely the pain of an ordinary human death by crucifixion.

But since pain is a sensed privation of a desired good, an intensely sensed privation of what is intensely and most naturally desired is the most intense pain. Now, this life, and the union of the soul with a healthy body and with a healthy heart abounding in blood and vital heat is most intensely desired with a completely natural appetite...Therefore, the sensed privation and separation of the soul from a still-healthy body and heart is the greatest of all pains and far exceeds any pain that a mere creature can suffer.²⁰

This pain, the pain of separating his soul from his body by an act of will, is what Jesus voluntarily offered to the Father,²¹ an offering of greater worth than the penalty owed for all human sin.²² This act of redemption delivers those who are united with Christ by true faith, hope, and charity, and who persevere in voluntary imitation of Christ.²³

The other important point in this sermon concerns union with Christ. At the moment of his death, Christ makes possible a union with him in faith, hope, and charity through voluntarily offering his life to the

¹⁸ Concerning the doctrine taught in the passages I treat here, see McEvoy, 'Soul's Care for the Body', 43.

¹⁹ See McEvoy, 'Soul's Care for the Body', 46-7 and McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, 132. In Anselm, see *Cur Deus Homo* 1.21 and 2.4-6. For Anselm, the gift of Christ's life offered to God was the satisfaction of infinite value. (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.18) Thus, Anselm's account has no need to measure Christ's pain.

²⁰ Robert Grosseteste, *Ex Rerum Initiatarum* (ed. Gieben, 'Preaching', 132): 'Cum autem poena sit sensata privatio boni appetiti, maxime poena est maxime sensata privatio maxime et naturalissime appetiti. Maxime autem, et appetitu maxime naturaliter appetitur haec vita et unio animae cum corpore sano et corde abundante sanguine et calore vitali...Summa igitur poenarum est sensata privatio et separatio animae a corpore et corde adhuc sano, et superexcellens omnem poenam a pura creatura inferri possibilem.'

²¹ Robert Grosseteste, *Ex Rerum Initiatarum* (ed. Gieben, 'Preaching', 132): 'Hanc igitur poenam oportet offerre voluntarie Deum-hominem Patri, et Sibi Deo, et Spiritui Sancto, uni et indivisio rei publicae universitatis gubernatori in reconciliationem generis humani, potentia et virtute suae divinitatis, in infinitum excedente omnem virtutum et potentiam creatam, faciente hanc suae animae a corpore et corde suo adhuc sano separationem.'

²² Robert Grosseteste, *Ex Rerum Initiatarum* (ed. Gieben, 'Preaching', 133): 'Et est haec voluntaria huius poenae indebitae oblatio et sufferentia, – quia acerbitate immensae et omnem poenam exsuperantis, et maxime quia haec sufferentia est theandrica –, incomparabiliter acceptio omnino magis digna quam poena totius humani generis prius debita.'

²³ Robert Grosseteste, *Ex Rerum Initiatarum* (ed. Gieben, 'Preaching', 133): 'Sic ergo absoluto homine et Ei unito – ut praedictum est – vera fide, spe et caritate, et voluntaria perseveranter prout est ei possibile in huius vitae decursu imitatione, decet Ipsum ab aeternis tenebris et punitionibus hominem sic Sibi unitum, invito etiam eius iniusto detentore, eripere.'

Father on our behalf. Here again the context is a discussion inspired by Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Right after saying, in effect, that only God can pay the debt and only a man ought to pay it,²⁴ Grosseteste addresses the problem of how the God-man can do saving works on behalf of other humans. The answer is that they are personally united.

He explains:

For the one who adheres to him with true faith, firm hope, and persevering charity, is not separated from his person, but united, and is one Christ with him. As a result, it is not the united individual himself who does works of faith, hope, and love, but Christ who works in him, and the things which Christ works for him, he himself works through Christ and in Christ. For if according to the law of friendship each of two friends is the 'other self' to his friend through the bond and union of love and through unity of will in moral matters – and if the Son is the 'other self' to the Father – will not they all much more be one in him who are sons of the God-made-man through creation and regeneration...?²⁵

The part about the 'other self' Grosseteste gets from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁶ Robert has adapted Aristotle's idea in the interest of redemption. Since Jesus is the 'other self' to the redeemed, he can act in their place, both in the act of redemption and afterwards.²⁷

So then, from *Ex Rerum Initiatarum* we add to Grosseteste's theory of the death of Christ both how Christ's active breathing forth of his life on the cross was an infinitely worthy act of satisfaction²⁸ and how it brings the mystical person of Christ, that is, Christ with all the redeemed considered as one, to its full realization. To echo the wording of the Gospel of John,²⁹ Jesus laid down his life for his friends. This ultimate act of love makes the mystical personhood of Christ and his

²⁴ Robert Grosseteste, *Ex Rerum Initiatarum* (ed. Gieben, 'Preaching', 128): 'Per hunc modum, ut patere potest praedictis, et non per alium est inventio salutis universitatis, quia, assumpto homine in unitatem Personae divinae et existente uno et eodem numero Deo perfecto et homine perfecto, ipse unus et idem omnia potest quia Deus, et ita potest satisfactionem, cuius debitor est homo; et cum hanc facit, homo debitor eam facit.'

²⁵ Robert Grosseteste, *Ex Rerum Initiatarum* (trans. mine, influenced by McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, 131; ed. Gieben, 'Preaching', 128-9): 'Qui enim Ei adhaeret vera fide, firma spe et perseveranti caritate, ab Eius personalitate non est separatus sed unitus, et unus Eo Christus; ita ut non ipse unitus sit qui operatur opera fidei, spei et caritatis, sed Christus qui operatur in eo, et ut quae Christus operatur pro ipso, ipse per Christum et in Christo operetur. Si enim secundum legem amicitiae uterque amicorum per vinculum et unionem amoris, et per idem velle et idem nolle in rebus honestis, sit ipse alter qui sibi est amicus, et si filius est ipse alter qui pater: modo non multo magis Dei facti hominis filii per creationem, et filii per regenerationem... omnes erunt unum in Ipso?'

²⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.4 1166a30-34.

²⁷ McEvoy, *Robert Grosseteste*, 130.

²⁸ Grosseteste highlights the infinite worth of the act more clearly in his *Sermo de triplici hierarchia*, on which see McEvoy, 'Soul's care for the Body', 44.

²⁹ John 15:13: 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'

members both possible, as an act of satisfaction, and actual, as an act that they mystically share as friends.

Resonance with Karol Wojtyła's Personalism

With Grosseteste's unique view of Christ's death before us, we now can explore how well it resonates with three significant themes in Karol Wojtyła's personalism. I use the name "Karol Wojtyła" here to designate the man as a philosopher, rather than to delineate any particular time period of his life. I will build upon John Crosby's exposition of Wojtyła³⁰ and add some of my own thoughts based upon the *Theology of the Body* catecheses.

To bring the relevant themes into focus, I will use a single line from *Gaudium et Spes* 24:3, 'man...cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself'.³¹ This line was one of Wojtyła's favorites.³² I have counted eight separate passages in the *Theology of the Body* catecheses in which Wojtyła, as Pope John Paul II, refers clearly to this line.³³ Sometimes he invokes it to explain the meaning of sex in marriage, and at other times it relates to the choice of continence 'for the kingdom of heaven', that is, the celibate life of priests and religious.³⁴

The first theme I want to discuss is the basic idea of love as self-donation. If a man makes a sincere gift of himself, it is presupposed that he does so as an act of love. But an act of love has to be voluntary. Herein lies the attraction of Grosseteste's distinctive view. The event of Christ's death was a voluntary action. Furthermore, it was an act of self-sacrifice for the sake of his friends. On Grosseteste's account, then, the very moment of Christ's death becomes the ultimate instance of love conceived as an active gift of self.

Secondly, in Wojtyła's personalism, the gift of self to another is the way for a man to find himself fully. As Wojtyła explains this concept, genuine self-donation requires a prior self-possession. One cannot give

³⁰ Of particular importance to my presentation here is John F. Crosby, *Personalist Papers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), pp. 243-63. This is his chapter, 'Karol Wojtyła's Personalist Understanding of Man and Woman.'

³¹ N.C.W.C. translation, in *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II and the Instruction on the Liturgy*, ed. Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1967), p. 536.

³² On this line from *Gaudium et Spes* in Wojtyła's personalism, see Crosby, *Personalist Papers*, 246. Wojtyła, it is worth noting, was on the committee that drafted *Gaudium et Spes* for the Second Vatican Council and exercised great influence on the document. George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*. First Perennial Edition (New York: Harper, 2005), pp. 166-9.

³³ John Paul II, *Theology of the Body* 10:3, 15:1-5, 17:5-6, 19:5, 32:4, 77:2, 80:6, and 81:6. The version of *Theology of the Body* I am using is John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).

³⁴ See Matthew 19, esp. v. 12.

what one does not have. Yet it is also true that through the gift of self a person more fully discovers himself or herself.³⁵ The parallel in Grosseteste's vision is the realization of the mystical personhood of Christ in the Church.

Here the match with Wojtyła's personalism is delightfully close. First, Christ's ultimate self-donation depends upon his absolute self-possession. Only a person who is God, and also man, can lay down his life by voluntarily giving up his spirit. No created person has such complete possession of himself.

And there is a second point. Not only does Christ's self-donation depend on his already complete self-possession, but it also results in a sort of self-discovery. All the redeemed come to be mystically included in Christ's selfhood. As said above, the very act of will by which Christ gives his life is the very act that makes the mystical personhood of Christ in the Church both possible, through satisfaction, and actual, through the shared personal agency of Grosseteste's version of Aristotelian friends.

The third resonance with Wojtyła's personalism concerns Trinitarian love.³⁶ Wojtyła saw the community of persons in the Trinity as the metaphysical basis for the gift of self among persons.³⁷ In Grosseteste's view, Christ's self-donation, while made *for* his friends, is made *to* the Father. Wojtyła applied his own view of Trinitarian love to the same effect: 'That gift of self to the Father through obedience to the point of death (see Phil 2:8) is at the same time, according to Ephesians, an act of "giving himself for the Church."' ³⁸ Thus Grosseteste saw the Son's love for the Father as involving a complete and voluntary gift of himself, much as Wojtyła would later hold.

So then, Grosseteste, writing centuries before personalism became a philosophical current, developed a theory of the death of Christ that resonates strongly with Karol Wojtyła's personalism. Specifically, it resonates with Wojtyła's conception of love as an active gift of self, with his understanding of how self-donation requires prior self-possession and results in fuller self-discovery, and with his view of love within the Trinity.

³⁵ Crosby, *Personalist Papers*, 246-7.

³⁶ I am indebted to Michael Waldstein for pointing out this point of resonance when I delivered an earlier draft of this article as a paper at a conference on personalism. I cannot remember his remarks well enough to know whether my account actually matches what he said, however.

³⁷ See, for instance, John Paul II, *Theology of the Body* 95b:4.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Theology of the Body* 90:6 (trans. Waldstein, 478).

Towards an Appropriation of Grosseteste's View

The question now is whether a contemporary Christian personalist can or should try to recover Grosseteste's view. There are good reasons why one may like to do this. It helps the personalist think of Christ as the ultimate example to follow, even at the very moment of his death. This would be a great source of inspiration, moving us to love, not as merely accepting the consequences of our choices but as actively willing our self-donation. Christ is more than just an example though. Grosseteste's view also makes our active self-donation simultaneously Christ's act of self-donation through our mystical personal union. On this level, I want Grosseteste to be right.

Another reason Grosseteste's view is attractive is that it helps give expression to the principle articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* 22:1, 'that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light'.³⁹ Wojtyła believed that this idea was the theological lynchpin of the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁰ The Incarnation teaches us what it means to be human. Grosseteste's Christology, when understood through the lens of Wojtyła's personalism, can inform theological anthropology in this way.⁴¹ But there is an obstacle to this project: namely, the fact that Grosseteste was obviously wrong about some medical aspects of crucifixion. Christ's weakened state from the events of the previous night and that morning, along with the fact that asphyxiation, not blood loss, would have caused his death, may suffice to render Grosseteste's medical argument unsuccessful. On the other hand, the accounts in the Gospels do indicate that Jesus died more quickly than most crucified persons, and the fact that he cried out right before he expired may indicate that he still had some vital energy.

Regardless of whether we find Grosseteste persuasive concerning the medical cause of Christ's death, his view may still be correct in its main points. Even if Jesus did die of asphyxiation, medically speaking, it still can be true that he actively laid down his life at the moment of death. The fact that the person who died is God actually seems to require this. As a divine person, he had the power to keep body and soul together, even if the body was physically ruined. This means that, when the body was ready to expire, Jesus had to consent to the separation of his soul from his body, unlike any other embodied spirit. He could not

³⁹ N.C.W.C. translation, in *The Sixteen Documents*, 533.

⁴⁰ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 169.

⁴¹ It is worth observing that the Incarnation was a central concept in Grosseteste's theology generally, and so his Christology easily lends itself to this kind of thematization. For example, he says the subject matter of theology is *Christus integer*—the head in union with the members (*Hexaameron* 1.1.1). In *On the Cessation of the Laws* book 3, he argues on multiple grounds that the Incarnation would have occurred even if man had not sinned. There it becomes clear that, for Grosseteste, the God-Man is an integral part of the perfection of the universe.

die without an act of will in which he allowed physical ruin to have its natural effect – the separation of the soul from the body. This act of willing to give up his life was the active gift of himself to the Father for the sake of his friends.

I would suggest that in this view Grosseteste was faithfully following the teaching of the Fourth Gospel. In this Gospel, Jesus is presented as a divine person, the very Word of the Father.⁴² In this Gospel, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.⁴³ If he could raise Lazarus from the dead, he certainly could keep himself alive. Most importantly, in this Gospel, Jesus expressly says that he has the power to lay down his life and the power to take it up again, clearly referring to his own death and resurrection.⁴⁴ Since the resurrection of oneself is an act requiring divine power, the parallelism in Jesus' prediction seems to suggest that his death also is an act requiring divine power. Thomas Aquinas interpreted John's Gospel similarly, although he reasoned in the opposite direction. Beginning from the fact that Jesus' death was his own divine act, Thomas argued that his resurrection likewise was his own divine act.⁴⁵ The wording of the prediction also requires that the Word, rather than the Father, be the one thought of as exercising divine power to bring about Christ's death. Finally, John's Gospel says that Jesus 'handed over' (*parédōken*) his spirit when he died.⁴⁶ Although this could be read as nothing more than a euphemism for death, the fact that Jesus said he would lay down his life makes it more likely that the language of giving up or handing over indicates a true act carried out by Jesus. Grosseteste's view provides a way to conceptualize this act.

Paul Griffiths has defended a view similar to that of Grosseteste. Arguing from the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels, Griffiths suggests that the human flesh of Jesus when he walked the earth could only be damaged if he consented to such damage.⁴⁷ In Griffiths's analysis, the death of Christ did occur as a result of physical trauma,⁴⁸ but the whip and nails could only damage his flesh because he allowed it to happen.⁴⁹

⁴² John 1:1-18.

⁴³ See John 11:1-44.

⁴⁴ John 10:17-18: 'For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.'

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, art. 5. See quotation in note 4 above.

⁴⁶ John 19:30: 'When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.' (*Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27 revidierte Auflage, ed. Aland, et al. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1898, 1993]): '*hôte oīn élaben tò óxos [ho] Iēsoūs eīpen• tetélestai, kai klínas tēn kephalēn parédōken tò pneūma.*'

⁴⁷ Paul Griffiths, *Christian Flesh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), p. 39: 'He cannot be damaged in the flesh unless he assents to that damage...'

⁴⁸ Griffiths, *Christian Flesh*, 35-6.

⁴⁹ Griffiths, *Christian Flesh*, 38-9.

This also may follow from his divinity. If Christ has the power to lay down and take up his life, it seems likely that he also has the power to prevent any particular damage to his body. Thus he must choose to allow all such damage to occur.

So even if we do not revise our medical understanding of how Jesus died, the important features of Grosseteste's view, and their personalist value, can survive. On this account, Grosseteste was right to hold that Christ had to breathe forth his Spirit actively but perhaps wrong about why this was necessary. Jesus had to lay down his life not because his body was still healthy, but because as God he had the power to keep his body alive, no matter how damaged it was. He also had the power to prevent each individual injury. This means that Jesus was actively willing, not only passively accepting, his death both leading up to and in the moment when he died. It was an active gift of himself to the Father for his mystical body. And, if we like Grosseteste's view of satisfaction, it still can be true that in this ultimate act of self-donation Christ makes his mystical personhood in the Church both possible and actual.

In conclusion, it appears that Robert Grosseteste, in his view of the death of Christ, adumbrated some important personalist concepts that would ultimately find clear expression in the writings of Karol Wojtyła. I do not think Grosseteste's view actually influenced anyone to help develop these ideas. Rather, I think he is a witness to the fact that these ideas are nascent in the very Gospel accounts that were equally sources of inspiration for both Grosseteste and Wojtyła.

Further, Grosseteste's view remains relevant for Christians today, inasmuch as Grosseteste can inspire us to see the death of Christ as the ultimate act of love – in Christ's gift of himself to the Father, in Christ's self-possession prior to giving himself, and in the realization of the mystical personhood of Christ and the Church that results. This opens a way for a personalist Christological anthropology in which the Christian would see suffering for others as the occasion for an active, rather than a passive, gift of self and would see such actions as the very acts in which Christ continues actively to give himself in love.

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