1 | Discerning the Body of Christ

> The one who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgement upon oneself.
>
> 1 Corinthians 11.29

In the course of his public ministry, Jesus Christ utters more than a few sentences that give the reader cause for pause. Even Christ's audiences in the narratives of the Gospels are often left puzzled by his locutions. For instance, after clearing the Temple of money-changers and merchants, Jesus declared, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'[1] To this his interlocutors respond, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you in three days will raise it up?'[2] Or there is the vignette with poor Nicodemus, who takes Jesus' instructions to be 'born again' to mean that Nicodemus has to literally climb back into his mother's womb.[3] Or there is the befuddled crowd at the synagogue at Capernaum who remark after one of Christ's particularly challenging addresses, 'This is a difficult statement, who can even understand it?'.[4]

Perhaps one of the most difficult sayings of Jesus – and one of the most hotly contested sayings in the history of Christian theological reflection – occurs at the Last Supper before Jesus' death. In this emotionally, spiritually, and theologically charged scene, just prior to his betrayal, passion, and crucifixion, Jesus clearly wishes

[1] John 2.19.
[2] John 2.20.
[3] John 3.3–4.
[4] John 6.60.

to communicate something deeply profound to his followers. In order to do so, Christ takes some bread, blesses it, breaks it, gives it to those at the table with him, and says, 'This is my body.' Then, similarly, he takes a cup of wine, passes it around to his disciples, and says, 'This is my blood.'[5] Only a moment's reflection provokes the response that this is indeed a difficult statement, who can even understand it?

My project here is to give a constructive proposal for how to understand those difficult statements. Many in the Church's history have provided interpretations of those utterances. There has been a wide spectrum of views ranging from starkly literal interpretations to purely metaphoric explications of those phrases. In this chapter, I present a range of interpretive options with respect to those utterances; this presentation will serve to locate my own proposal on that spectrum. However, before wading into these interpretive options, I first note some aspects of my operating procedure in this project.

Declarative Theology

This project attempts to be an instance of what some medieval theologians referred to as 'declarative theology'. Although this mode of theologizing was the subject of much disagreement among these theologians, I take declarative theology – in the sense sketched in this section – to be a helpful moniker for my approach to this topic. I here offer a description of declarative theology by way of a foray into some debates held in the fourteenth century. However, my purpose here is not to settle historical disputes, but simply to glean methodological insights from my theological progenitors.

A distinction made and defended by the likes of Durandus of St.-Pourçain, Peter Aureoli, Godfrey of Fontaines, Gregory of Rimini,

[5] Matthew 26.26–28, Mark 14.22–24, Luke 22.19-20, and 1 Corinthians 11.23–25.

and Peter of Candia is between *declarative* theology and *deductive* theology.[6] Both types of theology refer to the manner of reasoning that is properly theological discourse. For instance, Durandus offers this definition of declarative theology (what he also calls 'defensive' or 'persuasive' theology): 'a lasting quality of the soul by means of which the faith and those things handed down in Sacred Scripture are defended and clarified by using principles that we know better'.[7] Deductive theology, on the other hand, is 'a lasting quality of the soul by means of which it deduces further things from the articles of faith and the sayings of Sacred Scripture in the way that conclusions are deduced from principles'.[8] Both types of theology focus on the teaching of Scripture and the articles of faith, but they differ with respect to where those components fit into theological arguments.

By 'articles of faith', I take it that these theologians mean the first principles of the Christian religion as contained in Scripture, the Creed, and/or other authoritative sources for theological reflection.[9] These first principles would include such propositions as *that God exists*, *that God is triune*, *that Jesus Christ is God and a human*, *that God the Father Almighty is maker of heaven and earth*, and so on. For

[6] I am indebted to my former teacher Stephen F. Brown for bringing this distinction to my attention. In the historical material of this section, I largely follow his analysis in 'Declarative Theology after Durandus: Its Re-presentation and Defense by Peter Aureoli', in *Philosophical Debates at Paris in the Early Fourteenth Century*, eds. Stephen F. Brown, Thomas Dewender and Theo Kobusch (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 401–421; 'Peter of Candia's Hundred-Year "History" of the Theologian's Role', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991): 156–190; 'Medieval Theology' in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 133–146.

[7] Durandus de Sancto Porciano, *In I Sent.* [A], prol. in Brown, 'Declarative Theology', p. 405.

[8] Ibid., p. 406.

[9] I include the last clause because I take it that these fourteenth-century theologians held the teaching of the Roman Catholic magisterium to be a locus of Christian first principles as well as Scripture and the Creed. However, I do not think that the methodology of declarative theology need take a position on just what the first principles are or where they are found. Thus, it can be utilized by Christian theologians of a variety of traditions.

deductive theology, these propositions serve as premises in a theological argument wherein the conclusion is an extension of the content of theology. For example, a deductive theologian could perhaps make the following argument where (a) and (b) serve as premises that lead to conclusion (c): (a) God is indivisible, (b) anything composed of parts is divisible, thus (c) God is not composed of parts. Arguably, premise (a) is a first principle contained in Scripture (perhaps the deductive theologian could point to the *Shema* as an expression of this premise). Premise (b) is derived from metaphysical reflection. The conjunction of (a) and (b) yields (c), that God is not composed of parts. This is just a rough argument for something like the doctrine of divine simplicity, but it is here only to illustrate the methodology. *That God is not composed of parts* is not stated explicitly in Scripture or in the Creed. But the deductive theologian beginning with the first principle regarding God's unity, and then in adding another premise, deduces a theological conclusion.

In distinction from deductive theology, according to Durandus, declarative theology inserts the aforementioned first-principle propositions as conclusions in theological arguments. A declarative argument can be made utilizing similar components as the preceding example: (a) any division of an entity diminishes that entity; (b) God cannot be diminished; thus (c) God is undividable. Here, the conclusion (c) of this argument is the same proposition as premise (a) of the preceding argument. In both, the proposition *that God is undividable* is a first principle, an article of faith, derived from Scripture. In the deductive theology example, this proposition functions as a premise in an argument for something like a doctrine of divine simplicity. In the declarative theology instance, this proposition is the conclusion of the argument. Thus, the distinction might be characterized as deductive theology argues *from* the first principles, whereas declarative theology argues *to* the first principles.

However, it must be stressed that the declarative theological arguments are not intended to establish epistemic assent to the first

principles. Aureoli, the archetypal defender of declarative theology, is explicit that assent is due to faith alone, and faith is a gift from God. One believes *that God is triune* because one has the gift of faith, and this is the case for the theologian and the non-theologian alike. Thus, in describing the habit of theology, Aureoli says, 'Every habit that makes something to be *imagined better* by the intellect without producing any assent is a declarative habit.'[10] This theological practice does not produce assent to the truth of the article of faith, for that would make one's faith dependent on the argument. However, the argument serves to help the possessor of faith to 'imagine better' that which that one already believes on account of faith.

If one already believed the propositions of the articles of faith, it might seem that the arguments that declarative theology makes would be superfluous. In order to show why the possessor of faith would benefit from theological arguments, in his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* Aureoli entertains four ways that one who had faith might misunderstand that which one believes. First, for instance, one might not understand the meaning of the terms used in an article of faith. *That Jesus Christ is one person with two natures* would be difficult to understand if one only had a rudimentary grasp of key terms such as 'person' or 'natures'. Secondly, Aureoli imagines one who believes the articles of faith, but also comes across arguments against the faith, which produce confusion in this one's mind. Thirdly, one might misunderstand the articles of faith because one 'lacks examples, confirming arguments, or analogies related to' belief.[11] Fourthly, and finally, one might misunderstand because she does not have probable arguments to support or confirm what she already believes. The declarative theologian seeks to dispel these inhibitors to understanding. The result will be a theological methodology that 'makes the believer imagine in a better and clearer way

[10] Petrus Aureoli, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, prooem., sect. 1, n. 112, ed. E. M Buytaert (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1952), p. 164, in Brown 'Declarative Theology', p. 414, emphasis added.

[11] Ibid.

the things he believes, and yet it will not be what makes him believe, since he most firmly would already hold these things by faith.'[12] The arguments of declarative theology are not intended to establish or create faith, rather they are intended to enable the one who already believes the articles of faith to do so better.

Now, a quick caveat before proceeding: I do not think that one must be forced into a strict bifurcation between deductive and declarative theology. Stephen Brown describes Peter of Candia as one who offered a synthesis between these two modes of theologizing.[13] Peter of Candia's simple point is that these are not mutually exclusive tasks and theologians are called upon to perform both tasks at different times. I am happy to accept this point, and thus accept the utility of deductive theology in certain contexts. However, I see my current project here as an instance of declarative theology. As such, I will be working to an article of faith as a conclusion, rather than extending a theological argument beyond an article of faith.

As I see it, declarative theology is an instance of the theological motif of faith seeking understanding made famous by St. Anselm of Canterbury. The practitioner of this mode of theologizing starts with some notion that one believes by faith, and then seeks to understand that notion deeper through exploration, argumentation, and clarification. However, once understanding is in place, it is not as though faith has been dispensed with or superseded. Rather, as Aureoli described, that which is believed by faith can be held more deeply and more confidently – that is, more with faith, as the Latin root of confidence implies. Thus, in the face of the question, 'Do you believe this consecrated piece of bread to be the body of Christ?' my answer is the same as that of the man who responded to Jesus in Mark 9, 'I believe, help my unbelief!' And this is my operating procedure in this work.

[12] Ibid., p. 415.
[13] See Brown, 'Peter of Candia', pp. 171–173.

Recall from the preceding that Durandus characterized declarative theology as a mode of argumentation by which the articles of faith are 'defended and clarified by using principles we know better'.[14] When we clarify and define terms, we do so using terms that we know better. When we offer simple analogies to explain complex ideas, we are using those things that we know better to explain those which we do not; or we are using those things our audiences know better to explain that which they do not. In the declarative theology of my medieval progenitors, this is where philosophy – especially Aristotelian philosophy – comes in. I too will follow suit by pivoting at times to utilize philosophy as premises in the theological arguments to come. Whereas Durandus, Aureoli or Peter of Candia was likely to use sections of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or *Ethics*, I will be drawing on such contemporary philosophical tools as speech-act theory from the philosophy of language, the Extended Mind Thesis from the philosophy of mind, dispositional properties from analytic metaphysics, and others. Thus, I follow a longstanding practice in the Christian theological tradition of utilizing the latest philosophy as a 'handmaiden' for my theological work.[15]

In this project, the Scriptural and liturgical utterances 'This is my body' and 'This is my blood', when spoken of a piece of consecrated bread and a measure of consecrated wine, are a given. The article of faith given by Scripture and the Christian liturgical tradition – a first-principle proposition – may simply be stated as *This is the body of Christ,* where the indexical 'this' refers to a consecrated and renamed piece of bread.[16] This proposition, while being an article

[14] Durandus de Sancto Porciano, *In I Sent.* [A], prol. in Brown, 'Declarative Theology', p. 405.

[15] The notion that philosophy is the handmaiden to theology can be traced to Clement of Alexandria. See *Stromata* I.5 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*, vol. 2: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1979), p. 305.

[16] The phenomena of consecration and renaming will receive a full treatment in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

of faith, then, is the conclusion to the argument of this monograph. Again, like Aureoli, I do not intend assent to the article of faith that I am investigating to be dependent upon the philosophical premises in the argument. Rather, these tools that we 'know better' are employed to clarify, explain, and defend this article of faith. The article is accepted on faith; my hope for this project is merely that the article will be 'imagined better' as faith seeks understanding.

Some Conceptual Preliminaries

With my declarative theological methodology stated, I move in this next section to describe some of my conceptual presuppositions, both hermeneutical and philosophical. I do not contend for these preliminary assumptions, but I think I stand on the firm footing of others who commend these preliminary notions. First, I discuss my approach to the canonical text of Scripture and its relation to the liturgical tradition of the Church in doing constructive Eucharistic theology. This is followed by a preliminary discussion of definitions of some philosophical terms.

Hermeneutical Preliminaries

My posture towards the Scriptures is to take them as a coherent, consistent, and canonical whole. Despite the attempts of some scholars to get behind the text of the New Testament to reconstruct the historical event of Christ's words at the Last Supper, my project need not rest on that attempt. It is sufficient for a constructive Eucharistic theology to take the biblical material as a given. I also take the liturgical tradition of the Church to be a significant component of the material that Eucharistic theology attempts to account for. My project is not merely to exegete a biblical account of the Eucharist, nor to merely reflect on the practice of the Eucharist in the tradition of the Church, but to see these two as aspects of the total data set

with which a thorough Eucharistic theology needs to reckon. I think John Zizioulas expresses some of these concerns well: '[E]verything the New Testament tells us about the Eucharist is inseparably linked to the Church's experience of this act'.[17] Both Scripture and the liturgy are constituents of the material from which reflections on the Eucharist spring.

Not only are these two – Scripture and liturgy – givens in this project, I am attempting to read Scripture with the Church's liturgical tradition. For instance, in the next chapter I will elicit themes from John 13–16 to set a conceptual backdrop for the institution of the Eucharist that comes in the Synoptic Gospels. John 13–16, according to the narrative itself, occurs on the evening before Christ's crucifixion. The institution narratives of the Synoptics, according to their narratives, also occur on the evening before Christ's crucifixion. The liturgical tradition has not seen these events in conflict, but has instead liturgically commemorated both the actions and teaching of John 13–16 along with the institution of the Eucharist.

This liturgical reading of the events before Christ's passion is most clearly seen in Holy/Maundy Thursday liturgies. The very term 'maundy' comes from the Latin of John 13.34: 'A new command (*mandatum*) I give to you …' and many Maundy Thursday liturgies include a washing of feet ceremony, repeating Christ's actions in John 13.4–12. Yet, this liturgy pivots to commemorate the institution of the Eucharist – Scriptural material that comes not in in the chapters following John 16, but in the Synoptics and Paul. Within the Anglican branch of the Church, the lectionary tradition reflects both these commemorations. The Anglican Church in North American (ACNA) and The Episcopal Church (TEC) lectionaries both instruct the Gospel reading for Maundy Thursday to be either John 13.1–15 (the washing of the disciples' feet) or Luke 22.14–30 (the Lucan account of the institution of the Lord's Supper). This is

[17] John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, ed. Luke Ben Tallon (London: T&T Clark, 2011), p. 1.

in conjunction with the Epistle reading being the Pauline account of the institution narrative from 1 Corinthians 11 (verses 23–26[27–34] in ACNA and verses 23–26[27–32] in TEC). Likewise, *Common Worship* of the Church of England includes the same Epistle reading (only verses 23–26) and the only Gospel option as John 13.1–17, 31b-35. The Orthodox Church in America is, I think, representative of the Eastern tradition in its lectionary choices. At the Vespers and Divine Liturgy of the Great and Holy Thursday, a composite Gospel reading is offered combining Matthew 26.1–20; John 13.3–17 (the foot washing); Matthew 26.21–39 (the Lord's Supper institution); Luke 22.43–45; Matthew 26.40–27.2. This follows an Epistle reading of 1 Corinthians 11.23–32 (Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper).

My point in highlighting these lectionary nuances is to show that the liturgical traditions of Eastern and Western churches have had no trouble reading the scenes in John 13–16 as relating to the same events that the Synoptics and Paul describe as the institution of the Lord's Supper. That the Fourth Gospel does not specifically contain a vignette introducing the Lord's Supper has not prevented the Church from reading the Synoptic Eucharistic institution narratives in light of the Johannine Last Supper narrative. With respect to John 13–16 as a commentary on the Synoptic portrayal of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Zizioulas writes, 'It is even more instructive to look at the long speech of Christ to the disciples the night before his passion. In the Fourth Gospel this discourse takes the place of what might be called the "commentary on the meal" in the synoptic accounts.'[18] One could certainly argue the tradition should not have done this – and that Zizioulas is wrong – but my modus operandi is simply to accept this liturgical tradition as a given, and thus see it as warrant for my biblical-theological move to read John 13–16 as a conceptual backdrop for the institution of the Eucharist that occurs in the Synoptics.

[18] Ibid., p. 8.