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PIETAS

A Journal of Tradition, Place, and Things Divine



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by Michael Driscoll

On the Philosophical Significance of Mary as New Eve
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On the Philosophical Significance of Mary as New Eve

Marco A. Andreacchio

Inter vocationem Beatae Virginis et verae philosophiae strictam consonantiam prospicere licet.—Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §108

NEW ADAM, NEW EVE

In order to best appreciate the ancient identification of Mary as “New Eve,” we should recall the ancient identification of Jesus Christ as “New Adam”. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 we read of the distinction between two Adams. The first Adam is a paradigm for all men (*ho protos anthropos Adam*), defined as a living soul (*psyche zoes* or *anima vivens* already as per Genesis 1:30), or as soul (*psyche* or *anima*) in flesh or “the earthly” (1 Cor 15:48); the second, last or final Adam (*ho eschatos Adam*) is found in life-creative spirit (*eis pneuma zoopoion*). While the Adam we read of in Genesis is endowed with life, the Adam named Jesus Christ *endows* with life; while the first enters into flesh, the last draws out of the flesh—out of darkness. The second Adam is the fulfillment of the first in the sense that in the second manifests the truth about or perfection of the first. The very light that descends into darkness is revealed as the light that ascends out of darkness, into itself as light, or into light’s proper or heavenly place (1 Cor 15:47–50). The truth about the descent is revealed in the ascent, so that ascent emerges as a “return” or “turning back” (*metanoia* as the Hebrew *teshuvah*). The truth about the animated Adam—Adam moved outside of himself—is revealed in an unmoved moving Adam.

What is the difference between “soul” and “spirit” here? Spirit is that by which soul enters into darkness and ascends out of it. Spirit is the eternal, heavenly or divine (1 Cor 15:50) motor or true nature that soul leaves behind on its way back to it.¹ Soul is then the

¹ “The principle of motion within the thing itself is its nature” (ἡ γὰρ φύσις ἐστὶν ἡ ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχουσα κινήσεως ἀρχή—Aristotle, *De Caelo*, Bk. 3.3, 301b17). Compare *Metaphysics*, 1070a4–9. Though the “earthly” center of moving things (their *causa formalis*) does not move, it does not resolve motion in itself, but in the “heavenly” end for the sake of which things move (their *causa finalis*), even as the “Omega” (*terminus ad quem*) of movement is none other than the vindication of the “Alpha” (*terminus a quo*).

erring guise of an unerring spirit.² Man within darkness—outside of his proper, heavenly seat—versus man outside of darkness, or hidden to darkness, even as he manifests himself to the earthly in earthly or mortal terms.

The ascent (*anabasis*) presupposes a descent (*katabasis*), so that “what is first is not what is spiritual, but what is animated [here *psychikos* rather than *physikos* or “natural”]; thereafter comes what is spiritual” (*sed non prius quod spiritale est, sed quod animale: deinde quod spiritale*—(1 Cor 15:46). “First” (*proton*, reads the Greek) denotes temporality. The first Adam, as it were, falls into time (in Aristotelian terms, he is a *causa finalis* turned into a *causa formalis*). The second, however, marks the *end* of time and so of finite or discrete motion: as spiritual (*pneumatikos*), he marks the essential distinction between the human and the beastly. In the second Adam the first is fully redeemed in the sense that his superiority with respect to all other animals or animated beings is fully confirmed. Unlike all other animals, man descends into darkness by way of rising all the way out of it, to his “proper” or heavenly place; for though he is in this world, he is not of this world (John 17:14–16).³

Now, in Books 3.23.5 and 5.19.1 of his *Against Heresies* (*Adversus Haereses*), with reference to Genesis 3:13, Irenaeus (second-century bishop of Lyon) draws a direct, if only tacit parallel between the two Adams of Romans 5:19 and two virgins—both equally pure, though only the first was “disobedient,” in the sense of not being heedful to God’s word. As “second Eve,” Mary personifies the perfection of Eve beyond all erring. Just as through Eve’s being led astray by the Serpent of Eden mankind falls into bondage to death, now through Mary’s being guided by Archangel Gabriel, mankind is freed to partake in everlasting life. But just as Jesus represents the truth or perfection of the Adam of Genesis, so must the Virgin Mary personify the spiritual truth about the first woman. In or as Mary, the prototypical Virgin is sanctified as untainted receptacle of universal salvation.

In the final paragraph of his 1997 encyclical *Faith and Reason* (*Fides et ratio*), Pope John Paul II quotes Pseudo-Epiphanius, eighth-century Christian theologian, as having compared the Virgin Mary to “the table at which faith sits in thought.”⁴ The encyclical adds that in Mary,

² Cf. Romans 5:19: the one door through which “the many” (*hoi polloi*) cease listening to God is the very door through which they regain their hearing.

³ Compare Aristotle, *De Caelo*, 2.12–13 and 4.5.

⁴ Pseudo-Epiphanius, *Homily in Praise of Holy Mary Mother of God*, *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, 161 vols. (Petit-Montrouge: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866), 43:493.

“the holy monks of Christian antiquity ... saw a lucid image of true philosophy and they were convinced of the need to *philosophari in Maria*.” Mary would be the image of true philosophy as “feminine nature” or pure receptacle of the Incarnation, just as philosophy would be the place where we are purged of the obscurity preventing us from understanding the theological content of our faith. In this sense would philosophy be *ancilla theologiae* (handmaiden of theology): not in the sense that its freedom is limited by or subsumed under religious authority, but in the sense that natural reason justifies our *fidei intellectionem*, our “understanding of faith,” which is our “theology,” awakening us to the truth about the divine foundation of our world—a truth that Christianity will name *parousia*.⁵

Socrates himself, to be sure, highlights the mediating/purging function of philosophy as preparation for a death envisioned as realm of discourse with pure spirits: dialogue hidden in nature.⁶ But is *logos* in nature not the truth about “natural reason” (*ratio naturalis*), the

⁵ On a vulgar/modern reading of Thomas Aquinas, the *doctor angelicus* would be positing “theology” as making use of philosophy as a lesser discipline helping clarify what is taught by theology itself independently of philosophy (for an example of such a reading, see Jonathan Culbreath, “[The Marian Vocation of the Philosopher](#).” The reading in question is likely to take its textual bearings from Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*, 1a q. 1 a. 5 ad 2, where Thomas is juxtaposing a “sacred teaching” (*sacra doctrina*) to “philosophical disciplines” (in the plural). These disciplines are posited as less theoretical than the “science” (the “sacred teaching” as “secret transmission”) presented by Aquinas, insofar as this science acquires (*accipit*) its principles directly from God through a revelation (*immediate a Deo per revelationem*). The divine unveiling is juxtaposed to *degrees* of “manifestation” (*manifestatio*) of the contents of the sacred teaching. Yet, Thomas is not pitting theology against philosophy, but defending the primacy of a purely theoretical science (*theorein* as such) over practical sciences. In his *Commentary to Boethius’s De trinitate*, Aquinas identifies *sacra doctrina* with what Boethius calls *theologia* or *divina scientia*, being “the science of God” or “metaphysics” or “first philosophy”—Lecture 2, Q. 5, art. 1—while distinguishing further a worldly sense of theology from a sacred sense. In the former case, “principles” are considered in the abstract relatively to things, while in the latter principles are *things themselves*. The expression *sacra doctrina* should then be read as pertaining to “true philosophy” or *pure* natural reason, or reason-in-God, which communicates the principles of things as *ideas* generated directly by the divine mind, whereby they would be self-evident (belonging to the divine as such) prior to their becoming evident relatively to human efforts (to discover or to understand). Thomas’s *sacra doctrina* as *prima philosophia* is none other than the secret transmission of what Plato would call “ideas” (the true forms of things, or things-themselves as purely spiritual realities) from God to God (hence its properly speculative character). In this context, we move from ancillary, relatively “practical” (*practica*) modes of knowledge to a purely “speculative” (*speculativa*) knowledge. Yet, the latter’s disclosure stands as the principle of the workings of “practical” disciplines. When all is said and done, *sacra doctrina* pertains to a transmission of understanding at work *within* all human efforts to understand—much as Aristotle’s *energeia* inheres in all ordinary *ergon*. It would be fair to say that “philosophy is the handmaiden of theology” (though Aquinas avoids any such blunt proposition) insofar as the divine guides us to itself through natural reason as “incarnation” of God’s innermost being (and in this case theology will belong properly to God alone). Aquinas’s reference to practical sciences as ancillary to speculative science is another story. What Aquinas calls “philosophical theology” stands to a properly divine *sacra doctrina* as Aristotelian “universals” stand to Plato’s *ideas*, where the idea manifests itself to us as a poetic form in and through which we are to undergo spiritual purgation. This is what St. Bonaventure would call *itinerarium mentis in deum*—the journey of the human mind to its perfection in God.

⁶ As spiritual “midwife,” Socrates helps his interlocutor (including posthumously Plato’s reader) produce views serving as stages for reflection and so as aid to a spiritual awakening. Plato’s dialogues offer us ironic samples of how human consciousness is purged on a ladder of forms pointing hierarchically to the form of the good, which Plato’s foremost student, Aristotle, would expose as belonging to pure thought alone (properly speaking, only God can think or see God). See Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1965), 165: “Socrates’

reason that defines us as human beings prior to our attempting to define *it*? That same natural reason—as we shall see—would call us to be fully human, or to fulfill a properly human mandate.

Reason in nature is at once what our classical (both ancient and medieval) tradition calls *ars naturae*, the creativity of God “speaking” from within things, or producing all things eternally.⁷ In the light of “reason in nature,” or of “the reason of nature” we begin appreciating spiritually enriching implications of the papal encyclical’s qualification of philosophy’s support of theology’s understanding, “so that it may be fruitful and productive” (*fecunda sit et efficax*). If theology is the understanding of faith, “true philosophy” (*vera philosophia*) cannot serve as mere or pragmatic appendix to it. As natural reason itself, philosophy must be inherently divine, or rooted in divine agency, filling the theological understanding of faith with a living content. Without true philosophy, there could be no Incarnation (which evidently entails the concreteness of the divine in human experience), but merely—if at all—hearsay intimations, echoes, promises of the presence of the divine, i.e., of divine agency, in our daily life. Without true philosophy born in Mary’s bosom/form, our faith would be in vain,⁸ for we would then trust words that may be true *qua* words or as generic hypotheses (even as some Kantian “as if” / *als Ob*), but that would be false as regards to factual content (the words being mistaken for things themselves).

If we are to have faith in more than *nuda nomina* or “mere names,” we are to accept Mary, true philosophy’s immaculate persona or perfect Muse, as mediator allowing us to see the actual content of the names by which we refer to the divine, and so to the sacred content of nature. In Mary, true philosophy would awaken us to the living presence of the names we faithfully profess, purging us of the darkness that the names alone (names unaided by true

maieutic art, as we infer from what he says in the *Theaetetus* (150bff.; 210bff.), is more likely to make young men deliver ‘nonsense’ (151c7) and ‘wind-eggs’ (151e6; 210b9) than to make them deliver something ‘genuine and true’ (150c3). But to submit oneself to refutation without getting angry and feeling disgraced is the first and indispensable step in the process of ‘giving birth’ to something true, that is to say, in the process of learning.” On Socratic maieutics as aiming at improving opinions/*doxai*, see Hanna Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 81.

⁷ On this problem see Marco Antonio Andreacchio, *Medieval Teachers of Freedom: Boethius, Peter Lombard and Aquinas on Creation from Nothing* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

⁸ See Emmanuel Falque, “[The Virgin Mary, Birth, and Philosophy](#),” *Church Life Journal*, May 4, 2018. While in 1 Corinthians 15:14 it is explicitly the Resurrection—man’s awakening (the verb ἐγείρω is invoked) out of nature-as-death, in God—that justifies the Christian’s faith, the Resurrection-as-*anabasis* (ascent) loses all content without a presupposed Incarnation-as-*katabasis* (descent). To evoke the Gospel of John, light must descend into darkness in order to illuminate the world lost in it. In this respect, Michelangelo Buonarroti’s allusions to form hidden in marble (in Aristotelian terms, *eidos* hidden in *hylē*) testify to the Platonic soul of classical Christianity. See Michelangelo’s Rime 151, in Michelangelo, *Rime e Lettere*, ed. Paola Mastrocola (Torino: UTET, 1992): 196–97.

philosophy) would otherwise be used to conceal.⁹ Law itself would cease serving as a mask of iniquity in the hands of corrupt souls by being interpreted as a mirror of divine providence at work in human nature. And so our nature itself would no longer be assumed to be subject to laws imposed upon it *ex machina*, if only in the aftermath of its having been coerced into signing a contract of convenience that binds our desire to legal chains and thus compels us to love our servitude.¹⁰ Instead, our “fallen” nature would be seen in light of its divine perfection as worthy of inheriting a heavenly kingdom of pure spirit (*spiritus sanctus*) that laws can at best intimate but never seize for themselves—no more than darkness can appropriate light in John 1:5.

Pope John Paul II’s encyclical helps us appreciate why the bulk of modernist, non-Catholic biblical criticism would be opposed to medieval (viz. Catholic/Orthodox) Mariology.¹¹ Lack of understanding may be a necessary cause, but it is not a sufficient one given that the “active openness to the understanding” that is faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*) does not presuppose understanding, at least not in the order of generation, to speak with Aristotle.¹² A theology opposed to classical Mariology is a theology opposed to the natural reason embraced already by ancient Platonists—a reason that, while being seated in nature, proves to be providential in the government of human affairs.

PLATONIC THEOLOGY’S OBJECTION TO VOLUNTARISM

If reason is not to be found in nature, then what is? For the anti-Platonist or *voluntarist*, the truth about nature is incompatible with human freedom, or with our free choice.¹³ There is then an irreconcilable conflict between human freedom and natural necessity. Theologically speaking, God’s will is radically incommensurate with our will. Our will would need to submit

⁹ See Andreacchio, *Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet in Dante’s Spirit* (Routledge, 2026), which shows how Shakespeare articulates the questions at hand.

¹⁰ Giambattista Vico, *Principi di Scienza Nuova* (Napoli: Stamperia Muziana, 1744) and *De universi juris uno principio et fine uno* (Neapoli: Felix Musca, 1720), articulated a rigorous defense of classical Christianity as fundamentally incompatible with the contractualism of modern jurisprudence. For an introduction to Vico’s “antidote” to modern jurisprudence, see Andreacchio, “Autobiography as history of ideas: an intimate reading of Vico’s *Vita* (from «Lord Vico» to «The Names of Law»),” *Historia Philosophica*, 11 (2013): 59–94.

¹¹ See David Lawrence Edwards, *Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

¹² Aquinas, *Commentary to Boethius’s De Trinitate*, Q. 6, A. 1.c.4, citing Isaiah 7:9 via St. Augustine.

¹³ John Milton, *Areopagitica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 28: “When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions [i.e. in a puppet show].”

to God's will *irrationally*. Our religion should be one of unconditional surrender, or submission. By the same token, to echo Tertullian, Athens (philosophy) would have nothing to do with Jerusalem (Revelation).

Platonic Christianity rejects the voluntarist stance as obfuscating the true relationship between man and God. For on a classical Platonic understanding of things, faith is a gift that is at once divine *and* natural. This is to say that God opens us to himself *naturally*: it is not that our faith presupposes any decision (for us) to be faithful, but that our will presupposes our openness to the divine. Our openness, our faith, is primordial with respect to our will. We will anything by having already been opened to something, where that "something" is ultimately Being itself—mind as "creative understanding," what Aristotle called *nous poietikos*. God opens us to him whether we like it or not, and so quite aside from evil's influence on us. The light shines in the dark, disclosing our very being. We are then originally open to God and this openness of ours—this constitutive openness—is what our classics call *faith*. Those who do not have faith are precisely those who have abandoned their being to believe that faith depends upon their autonomous consent—their decision to submit to an irrational will. The faith they may then believe to acquire is an imposture, at least with respect to our original faith as human beings.

"Of what use is our freedom?" we might then ask. If we are not free to choose whether to have faith or not, can we truly be free? The God of the Bible—the one of Abraham and of Jesus, the one of Adam, the *true* one of the *anthropos*—calls us not to mistake a freedom based on our will, with a freedom grounded in divine intelligence. The former is deemed to be an imposture. Are we then not to will anything at all? What of "free will"? Once again, we are called to recognize that our will is free only inasmuch as it is disclosed in faith, where faith is the very disclosure of free will. Your faith heals you, placing you on the path of truth and so of liberation from evil (Mark 10:52, John 8:32). Here faith is the proper portal to the path of salvation, primal openness to truth itself. Indeed, faith seeks illumination: *fides quaerit intellectum*. Faith is thus an openness that journeys, an *active* openness.

The Platonic Christian acknowledges that we do not choose God; rather it is God who chooses or "elects" us through His incarnation (John 15:16: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and ordained you so that you may go and bear fruit and so that your fruit remain; so that whatever you shall ask the Father in my name, he may give you"). By the

same token, our Rabbi chooses us, not we our Rabbi or guru. What do *we* choose? Where our choice is *autonomous*, it rehearses the movement of self-affirmation of the fallen angel—the angel fallen from Grace into mechanical compulsion, strife or war. Autonomous choice is choice blind to its ground and thus compelled by the ground it is ignorant of. Free choice, on the other hand, is reason itself, which is the presence of divine intelligence in our dark world. We are truly free *naturally*, so that our freedom is inalienable; we are constitutionally free in the sense that our specific being is defined directly by God—defined by *reason in nature*. Accordingly, in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.60, Thomas Aquinas invites us to see that man is distinguished from other animals by a cognitive faculty that depends directly on divine intelligence and is thus unmediated by corporeal forces or motion. God moves the will (*movet voluntatem*, as seen in Prov. 21:1, Phil. 2:13). Further citing Jeremiah 10:23, Aquinas reminds us that “man is not the master of his actions (*homo non est dominus suorum actuum*). And yet, Aquinas adds, *Ecclesiasticus* (*The Book of Sirach*) 15 tells us that “God establishes man from the beginning, leaving him in the hands of his own counsel ... i.e. in freedom of choice” (*Deus ab initio constituit hominem, et reliquit eum in manu consilii sui ... idest in libertate arbitrii*).

Aquinas helps us see that freedom of choice depends on reason’s success in journeying through or examining particular circumstances of life, thereby making moral judgment free from contingencies. It is only to the extent that we remain rational and are moved by divine intelligence that we can exercise any free choice:

But man acts with judgment, since by the faculty of knowing he judges whether something is to be avoided or pursued. But since that judgment is not from natural instinct at work in a particular situation, but from some rational comparison, he then acts with free judgment, capable of being carried into diverse matters [*potens in diversa ferri*]. Thus reason concerning contingent matters is on a path open to opposites, as it is evident in dialectical syllogisms and in the arguments of persuading rhetoric. But particular works [*operabilia*] are certain contingent matters and so concerning them rational judgment stands on diverse paths, and it is not limited to one. And it is necessary that man be endowed with free choice, to the extent that he is rational.¹⁴

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 83, art. 1, resp.: “*Sed homo agit iudicio, quia per vim cognoscitivam iudicat aliquid esse fugiendum vel prosequendum. Sed quia iudicium istud non est ex naturali instinctu in particulari operabili, sed ex collatione quadam rationis; ideo agit libero iudicio, potens in diversa ferri. Ratio enim circa contingentia habet viam ad opposita; ut patet in dialecticis syllogismis, et rhetoricis persuasionibus. Particularia autem operabilia sunt quaedam contingentia, et ideo circa ea iudicium rationis ad diversa se habet, et non est determinatum ad unum. Et pro tanto necesse est quod homo sit liberi arbitrii, ex hoc ipso quod rationalis est.*”

“Free choice, which is nothing other than a faculty of election” (*liberum arbitrium, quod nihil aliud est quam vis electiva*)¹⁵ pertains to *means* to be related back to their proper end or given/original perfection. Whence the distinction Aquinas highlights between free choice and a free will (*libera voluntas*), which is a will that is free to the extent that it is determined directly by pure or divine intelligence.¹⁶ In this sense, God wants the salvation of men out of a gratuitous or *natural* will (*Deus vult salutem hominum ex gratuita voluntate*), as opposed to any will bound to a necessity outside of divine intelligence (*ergo non vult ex necessitate*); for God’s will stems directly or eternally “from the necessity of his own nature” (*ex necessitate suae naturae*), which is pure intelligence or noetic illumination.¹⁷ What God wants is nothing falling short of Himself, though in a secondary sense he wants all things restored or saved in God. Only God is perfectly free. We, on the other hand, are free only to the extent that we are rational and so only to the extent that we are guided by the presence of God’s intelligence in our dark or fallen world.¹⁸ What God wants primarily he wants eternally and that is his own eternal being (*esse*).¹⁹ In Aquinas’s words: “Whatever God wants to be in himself he wants by necessity; yet, whatever he wants concerning creatures he does not want by necessity.”²⁰ What God wants “concerning creatures” (*circa creaturas*) is not simply their eternal place in God, but signs of that place relatively to creatures’ falling short of it. God wills creatures into being in the sense that he wants them perfect in himself, but their being must emerge *naturally* out of dark non-being. The necessity of the will going hand in hand with the necessity of its object, God wants eternally only the perfection of things in himself and contingently the means or signs of that perfection. Insofar as we are not in God, our being and freedom fall short of necessity. We are then not merely willing the good, but electing signs reminding us of the good—signs of perfection, signs of our freedom in God. We are then, properly speaking, free in reasoning, rather than in willing:

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 83, art. 4, resp.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 19, art. 3, resp.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 23, art. 4, sc. and arg. 2–3.

¹⁸ For further articulations of the problem at hand, see Andreacchio, *Medieval Teachers of Freedom*.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 23, art. 4, arg. 3.

²⁰ “*Quicquid Deus vult esse in se ipso de necessitate vult; quicquid autem vult circa creaturas non de necessitate vult*”—Aquinas, *De Veritate*, Q. 23, art. 4, resp.; see also resp. 10.

Reasoning in a proper sense is to arrive from one thing to knowledge of another, wherefore in a proper sense we reason of conclusions, which are known from principles. Similarly, with respect to appetite, volition entails a simple appetite for a certain thing, whence the will is said to be of an end, which is sought for itself. But choosing is seeking [*appetere*] something for the sake of attaining to something else, so that in a proper sense it is of those things that are for the sake of an end.... Just as intellect is to reason, so is the will to the faculty of election, which is free choice.²¹

Choice then pertains to means and we choose means freely inasmuch as God's intelligence enters into darkness to shape signs of divine perfection, which is what we primarily want, though in our present condition we fall short of it. In choosing anything we are seeking a reminder of the "end" of what we choose, in God; and this end is what we primarily want, keeping in mind that in wanting it truly we are already in God.

If we are free in God, our present condition presupposes a fall from freedom and our need to return to or recover what we have lost, namely our proper place in divine intelligence. Yet, even in our fallenness, we retain a degree of openness to the divine. Even in darkness, we are sustained by light to reflect and reflect-upon that light. Now, that reflection necessarily entails the openness that is faith, even as the biblical sinner is alienated from his faith. So it is that in the Gospels, Jesus turns people back to their faith; his word, his very being encourages reflection, or a return that is both moral and cognitive to our being-open-to-God, our standing-in-faith to be filled with understanding, bathed in light, resurrected or awakened in the fullness of being.

Poenitemini, et credite Evangelio / μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ: "Turn back and believe in the Good Message." In Mark 1:15, Jesus calls Galileans to repentance—*teshuvah* or *metanoia*. Jesus is awakening listeners to their own humanity. But Jesus is the Word itself that speaks—no longer alone in the desert as that of the Baptist—in our very constitution as human beings. Not a word reaching us from without, but one manifesting itself from within, as living truth, the truth of our own life. No longer in the wilderness as a cry for tyrants to behead at a reptilian behest, but *being itself* speaking within the city, reminding us that the heart of the city remains open to a transcendent light of the mind. By

²¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 83, art. 3: "*Ratiocinari ... proprie est devenire ex uno in cognitionem alterius, unde proprie de conclusionibus ratiocinamur, quae ex principiis innotescunt. Similiter ex parte appetitus, velle importat simplicem appetitum alicuius rei, unde voluntas dicitur esse de fine, qui propter se appetitur. Eligere autem est appetere aliquid propter alterum consequendum, unde proprie est eorum quae sunt ad finem ... sicut se habet intellectus ad rationem, ita se habet voluntas ad vim electivam, idest ad liberum arbitrium.*"

being turned back to that light, we believe in things unseen, sustained by the light shining at the heart of our life, sanctifying our very birth in this our fallen world. We are called. Our birth is our mandate. We do not choose to have faith; our faith is not contingent upon our own decision, whether to impose our own ignorance upon things themselves, or to abdicate all free choice. We are called, and the calling awakens us to itself as living word—the water that quells all thirst eternally. Who would be speaking, awakening us as it awakens faith? It is the Word to which we owe our being, our very birth in faith; so that far from being a choice, repentance would be a calling that bespeaks the presence of God in Man. So do the Gospels show that faith itself has no precondition outside of God’s own agency in man; and that man is not truly or fully himself unless he places himself back in God.

VOLUNTARISM AND ISLAM

The foremost doctrinal manifestation of closure to reason in nature is found in Islam, which must be then understandably strenuously opposed to the right of existence as liberal nations—nations that swear by the possibility of progressing towards a world in which freedom triumphs over barbaric violence. As an essentially voluntaristic doctrine, Islam stands as the most formidable traditional enemy of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” where liberty is key to happiness. The Islamic enemy of “the West” does not believe in the *natural* dignity of the human being; he does not believe that happiness is compatible with the exercise of freedom. That is because he sees the human being as such, the “pagan” man, if not as radically evil, at least as radically prone to evil and so as being in dire need of submitting radically to a divine will altogether incommensurate to man’s will. The “enemy of the West” is not merely praying for the accomplishment of our heavenly father’s will, in which his children’s will is perfected; the Muslim as Muslim feels compelled to bring about a will that is so powerful and lofty that it has no place for genuine human freedom within it. Freedom is simply absent from the Islamic theocratic equation. What counts is not the restoration of human freedom in its heavenly father, but the transformation of human freedom into a license conceded by a will that has nothing fatherly about it—a will that does not raise us to it paternally, but that replaces our fathers as a perfect machine for which reason is allowed only as means to justify a universal mask of the machine, a *deus ex machina*, a God imposed mechanically or without any mediation—no questions asked. Hence, for instance, the

Quran's decisive modification of the Bible's account of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac. In the Islamic text, both Abraham and his unnamed son readily submit to irrational or mad authority, while God averts infanticide directly—no longer through an angel—on strict condition of unquestioned submission to a *de facto* tyrant. No room is left for the notion of a named son (a *who*, not merely a *what*) protesting his father's irrational submission to a God who turns out to be rational, after all. In short, Islam stands by a divinity of power that does not educate us as children, but that turns us into martyrs through a bond of unqualified submission. What we have here is submission without reflection, with the implication that pure reflection endangers our proper relationship with God.

TOWARDS A PLATONIC REDISCOVERY OF MARY

That Protestant theology would depart from medieval Mariology should come to no surprise given the distinctively *voluntarist* and thus anti-Platonist or neo-nominalist bent of the modern Reformation movement that finds in Martin Luther its staunchest father.²² Nor should it surprise us that the Protestant turn to an “original Christianity” preceding medieval Christianity mirrors an Islamic leap back to the origins of the universe, a leap expressive of an absolutist will to bypass the natural unfolding of human things.²³

²² Far from vindicating human freedom, voluntarism uproots it from reason in nature, thereby converting it *de facto* into license. On the anti-Platonic character of modern/Protestant Christianity, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 10, 60–61, 323–23; Edward Feser, “[Razor Boy](#),” *edwardfeser.blogspot*, March 8, 2011. For a “doctrinal” attempt to counter medieval nominalism/voluntarism, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 15–16. Insofar as nominalism is not merely a free-floating doctrine, so that it is ill understood when considered nominalistically—especially when it comes to interpreting the progressive/historical nominalism of our modern world (nominalist ontology unfolding existentially)—it cannot be adequately countered on doctrinal grounds. Inevitably, in falling back on the logic of worldviews, Milbank's work remains an “intellectual history” (guided by a consequentialist logic) that fails to escape the gravitational pull of voluntarism and its “traditionalist”/“perspectivist” ramifications. Indeed, post-modern attempts to return to “tradition” have systematically fed into the immanentistic/historicist conception of rationality or discourse proper of modernity (neo-nominalism). Strauss's “Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion,” in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1997) exposes Franz Rosenzweig's noble failure to overcome the challenges posed by modern rationalism for Jewish orthodoxy. On the contribution of ideologues such as Umberto Eco, author of *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976), originally published as *Trattato di semiotica generale* (1975), and Fredric Jameson, author of *The Prison-House of Language* (1972) that set the stage for a “transmodern” reconstruction of tradition on strictly voluntarist grounds, see Andreacchio, “[The Scientific Reconstruction of Dante](#),” *VoegelinView*, February 19, 2023. Even C.S. Lewis, who, in *The Abolition of Man* (1943), appealed to traditional “norms” to counter modern man's collective moral suicide, failed to escape the voluntarist trap. For a vivid representation of Lewis's romantic bent, see “The Queen of Underworld” in *The Silver Chair* (1953), or *The Discarded Image* (1964), which conflate the mystical and the imaginary beyond redemption. For a fuller discussion, see Andreacchio, “[Christianity in Narnia](#),” September 16, 2025.

²³ On the substantive rift between Islam and classical Christianity, see Rémi Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). On the virtues and vices of Brague's work, see Andreacchio, “[Rémi Brague's Europe: la voie romaine](#),” *VoegelinView*, November 13, 2020.

To be sure, the Jesus of the Gospels does incarnate the direct link between the human and the divine, a link bypassing, as it were, all other nexuses. Yet, the Gospels do not announce the overcoming of “pagan” nature, but its redemption.²⁴ The Gospels announce a spiritual restoration of both law and nature, rather than a legalistic suppression of nature in its pagan or ancestral dimension.²⁵ The Incarnation confirms the rootedness of paganism in true divinity, as well as the proper function of law as mirror of what is sacred in nature. The “primary cause” vindicates the inalienable dignity of “secondary causes” by confirming the teleological and hierarchical order of being. The pagan *qua* pagan—as “the Samaritan” of Luke 10:30—is not the enemy of the true faith, but the rightful inhabitant of a world begging to be illuminated.²⁶ True faith’s task lies here, in the illumination of the world in which all men are born as pagans. True faith does not seek to alienate us from our pagan roots, but to cultivate them in light of a common principle of order.²⁷

In Mary philosophy discovers itself, its destiny, as Christ, true natural reason, the light that shines in the darkness of the past, of the realm of the dead. Mary as true form of philosophy is the Christian muse *par excellence*, the model for all other women (etymologically, “wives of men”), so that they, too, may be *madonne*, ladies belonging to men-as-poets, as the form in and through which human desire is purged or converted into desire of the good itself, as of all that is good in all things.²⁸

Yet, Mary as philosophy’s true muse is by and large alien to us or to modern approaches to Christianity, in no small measure because of the modern rise of nominalism. This rise was occasioned by the extreme difficulty necessarily faced by pre-modern Platonists in defending the Platonic life before the tribunal of a popular imagination in the grip of what St. Augustine

²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 8 ad 2: “Grace does not eliminate, but perfects nature” (*gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*). The Medieval saying reminds us that God is not an imposition on nature, or that the divine act is the absolute fullness of the act of nature. Nature responds to its divine perfection in gratitude (*gratitudo*). The imperfect responds to the perfect in recognition of the former’s indebtedness. Grace and gratitude are bound by an eternal covenant: the way down and the way up; the descent and the return (*metanoia* as *anabasis*), joined in a mysterious ring. Grace descends to convert, raise, fill, and resurrect the fallen—to awaken the fallen and to redeem the imperfect, incomplete, and potential back into the fully actual. This is the hidden fullness of the act, of life, of being. Gratitude is kindled as we ascend into the fullness of grace—raised to partake in the mover that is not moved, the circle that is not encircled.

²⁵ Christianity’s medieval success tended to open the door to the legalism, or binding of truth to legal conventions, that the Gospels are strenuously and openly opposed to. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 157–64, further shows how, in the name of freedom, modernity radicalized the legalistic tendencies found in medieval scholarship. See Andreacchio, “Leo Strauss on Modern Christianity,” May 18, 2025.

²⁶ See Andreacchio, “The Good Samaritan: A Phenomenological Sermon,” *Voegelin View*, December 3, 2022.

²⁷ Vico, “Of the Elements,” *Principi di Scienza Nuova*, 5–7.

²⁸ This problem is cardinal to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. See above, n6.

notoriously denounced as *dominandi libido* (“lust for domination/power”).²⁹ Because the classical (both ancient and medieval) Christianity of “true natural reason” yielded *de facto*, if not *de jure* (as we see most notably in Protestantism), to a voluntarist enterprise continuously at war with the forces of anti-biblical progressivism, the very notion of a Christian *rationalism* is likely to strike us as an oxymoron. Yet, careful examination of the general character of modern Christianity and its “critical” underpinnings can help us appreciate the sense in which for classical Christianity man relates to God primarily through pure or purified natural reason and only secondarily or derivatively through the imagination.³⁰

As a result of the Machiavellian/Cartesian revolution, Christianity has generally become a matter of words and feelings: the Christian is expected to believe in words and then fill the words he believes in with his “charismatic” feelings supplemented or confirmed by charitable deeds—works of grace (*charis*). We begin with empty names that we then try to fill “creatively”. But is this what classical Christianity is about? When the Gospels call for belief in the *name* of Jesus Christ, they call us not to hold fast to a Cartesian ideal to be realized empathetically (through our love) but to pledge allegiance to the inherence of the divine in political or properly-human life.³¹ It is not enough for the Christian to posit the divine beyond the human; he must stand for the presence of the divine, the *parousia*, as the saving agent for nations. The Christian as such attests to the divine’s “con-descending” *under* the law: the principle of the law becomes *subject* to the law, exposing all legal corruption from the Cross. Yet, through the Cross, the legal mask of iniquity is converted into a mirror of man’s divine destiny to purge himself (to undergo repentance, as the “turning back” denoted by the Hebrew *teshuvah*) in preparation for the eternal life of pure spirit.

²⁹ In the preface to *City of God*, St. Augustine describes the earthly life of people as “dominated by lust to dominate” (*dominandi libido dominatur*). On Christianity as a Platonic defense of the Bible read as defender of the Platonic life, see Vico, “Of the Method,” *Principi di Scienza Nuova*. While the Christian defense of Platonic philosophy in light of the Bible is not legalistic, it necessarily occasions the blurring of the distinction between law and spirit/nature (see Strauss, “Classic Natural Right,” *Natural Right and History*, 120–64. In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche infamously dismissed Christianity as “Platonism for the ‘People’” (*Platonismus fürs »Volk«*). He argued that Europe, from resentment against the Platonic “error”, had grown strong enough to embrace a vitalistic non-dogmatic truth, one “beyond good and evil” and so beyond any absolutely pure good. On Vico’s reading, however, the “philosophy” that represses people is not Platonic, but nominalist/voluntarist. Christianity would then not impose any Platonic error upon nations, but invite them to awaken from their subjection to lust for domination by countering that lust’s voluntarist roots. Its pure reflection would transcend Nietzsche’s “will to power” by illuminating the irrational roots of his *amor fati*. Rather than Platonism translated for non-philosophers (this is Nietzsche’s point), Christianity is a universal invitation/call to “die” (or prepare for) a Platonic life. That invitation was made possible by the Hebrew Bible.

³⁰ On the distinction between the mystical (viz., natural reason in God) and the imaginative, see Aquinas, *Commentary to Boethius’s de Trinitate*, Q. 6 art. 1.

³¹ See Andreacchio, “[The Salvation of Nations: Why Jesus Helped the Centurion \(Matthew 8:5–13\)](#),” July 7, 2025.

The Gospels, however, expose a grievous obstacle to faith in Jesus Christ. Full commitment to the Cross is impossible as an imposition. The Christian faith must be *natural*; the Christian must gradually learn to see the Cross with open, candid eyes. He must undergo a *poetic education* allowing him to suffer without fear, to see Christ's pain as his own. This is where the appeal to the Virgin Mary emerges most meaningfully. Mary's eyes are to be our own. Only through Mary's intercession can we regain a pristine sight of things both human and divine; only thus can we see the divine at work in the human *naturally* and escape the trap of voluntarism, or the habit of conceiving the divine as an imposition on human nature.

Mary herself must be approached gradually, beginning from Eve, her foremost biblical antecedent. Genesis 3.15 is a *locus classicus* that helps us to approach Mary gently, appreciating her role as mediator between men and the perfect mediator found in Jesus Christ. In the canonical Latin rendering of the biblical verse where God addresses "the Serpent," *Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius: ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus*. Modern critics have long accused this translation of deviating from the original Hebrew (and Greek) by rendering a male pronoun with the feminine *ipsa*. Why is it that in the Vulgate and more generally in great exegetes of the Roman Catholic Church, Genesis 3.15 is read as indicating that it is Eve, notably in the person of Mary, who shall "bruise" or "crush" the head of the snake? The Greek αὐτός σου τηρήσει κεφαλὴν reads הָיָה *shuwph* as τηρέω or "watch over" in the sense of "guarding against," while the Vulgate *conteret* denotes a crushing. Do the Hebrew and Greek alike not indicate through a masculine pronoun that the *seed* of Eve shall "crush" the snake's head? The syntactical shift is understandable given the metaphorical character of "your head," which must be understood as extending to generations to come, but that in the original Hebrew addresses ostensibly the serpent, rather than its seed. Just as the text's "your head" refers to the serpent's seed, so does the *ipsa* or "she" of the Vulgate refer to Eve's own seed. Thus "she will crush your head" is to be read as including the sense of "her seed shall crush yours," with the further understanding that Eve shall act in her seed (as a spiritually renewed Eve) just as the serpent shall be "crawling" in his own. Thus the war between Eve and the serpent shall remain between the two at the heart of the conflict between their respective progeny. Similarly, the conflict between what St. Augustine speaks of as the City (or citizenship/community) of God (thus a purely spiritual order) and the earthly City

corresponds to an underlying conflict between good and evil. But how should Eve be good in the aftermath of her first error/erring?

In Act 2.2 of his *Twelfth Night*, a play dedicated overall to the celebration of spiritual renewal—of the Epiphany as well as of the purification *post-partum* of Mary—Shakespeare invites us to consider, through the character Viola, that Eve’s first fault is not, properly speaking, her own, but of her sight cut off from speech. Eve’s erring is not due to her will, which is good in itself, but to the way her will can be easily manipulated by false appearances, or evil disguised in words. Platonic interpreters of Genesis have, to be sure, long emphasized Eve’s innocence. Eve went astray by separating from Adam, and this she did not do out of any ill-will but because of the frail nature of the senses. Indeed, Eve would be traditionally seen as representing our sensory faculty, while Adam would be representing our rational faculty. Eve’s “distraction,” to echo Shakespeare, would pertain to her incapacity to follow reason or the rational thread of discourse, as opposed to “skipping” words. And yet, ironically, throughout antiquity it is thanks to Lady Eve that men have been taught to regain their reason—as Theseus recovers his “thread” thanks to Ariadne. Without the lady, the male hero would have remained lost in the labyrinth of language, even though the task of overcoming the monster hidden within the labyrinth could ultimately be met by a Theseus alone (in *Twelfth Night* “monsters” are related to “gender confusion”).³²

To return to Genesis 3:15, Eve crushes the serpent’s head, even as the Greek reads “watches out for” or “guards against”. The serpent is to hide and never dare become authoritative, for now Eve and her true progeny are strengthened by God’s Word—not a Word spoken merely to Adam apart from Eve, but a Word spoken both to reason and to the senses. This “complete,” *prophetic* Word allows Eve to be purged of her error, her being-misled by deceptive speech and the images it evoked in her imagination. The Bible itself confirms Eve in her capacity to oppose sophistry. Yet, the Bible itself begs for interpretation, so that Eve alone could hardly rise above the plane of mere suspicion against the deceitful speech biting at her heel (*tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus*). Eve must work with Adam, not in competition with him. She must and will support Adam, by loyally warning

³² In Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates emerges as the slayer of the Minotaur. Jacob Klein, “Plato’s *Phaedo*,” in *Lectures and Essays*, ed. Robert B. Williamson and Elliott Zuckerman (Annapolis: St. John’s College Press, 1985), 378, notes that “the new and *true* Theseus is *Socrates* and the old and *true* Minotaur is the monster called *Fear of Death*.” Socrates thus exposes the original, hidden identity of the Minotaur, an identity hidden in all discrete monsters, whether old or new.

him against spiritual “serpents”. Her pious senses will fight back, allowing Adam to then reason without hindrance.

The importance of Eve can hardly be overstated. Eve is entrusted with the mission of making Adam’s heroism not only possible but successful; and this thanks to the Bible, or the authoritative Word of God. Without this Word—this *Law*—Eve would not have the strength to guard against evil, so that Adam’s reason would lack a pure common-sense foundation. Reason could then be formally correct, though factually misguided as regards to content.

No one revolted against this discrepancy between form and content more heroically than Giambattista Vico, whose work stands as the glorious fruit of Renaissance poetry, or of the great revival of Platonic poetry that finds its foundational verses or *fioretti* in Dante Alighieri. Vico articulates with supreme and elegant precision problems that Shakespeare is articulating in opposition to the rise of a “brave new world” of Machiavellian extraction—a world in which a new “symbolic” form would be imposed universally upon content conceived as originally formless or worthless (what Descartes called *res extensa*). Vico’s objection to “the moderns” (from Machiavelli to Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza) comes with a warning against a peculiar radicalization of what Vico exposes as the corruption of pre-modern Christianity—a corruption that is traditionally known as *voluntarism*. The question of Eve’s purity is most pertinent. If Eve’s imagination (our *sensus communis*) is not originally or essentially pure, then human (Adam’s) reason can trust fully only its abstractions or “formulas of words” (Vico’s expression), not least of them “God” conceived *ex machina*. The theological-political upshot of the rejection of Eve’s natural purity is a religion for which God is an absolute imposition, or in which man’s proper stance towards the divine is defined absolutely as “submission.”

To be sure, once “God” is posited *ex machina* and submitted to *irrationally*, we can be reassured that God “loves” us, that he is closer to us than our jugular vein. What is of the essence is not what God can become for us, but what he is for us prior to our accepting him. Christianity exposes God as mysteriously or originally submitted to man: God gives/humbles himself—as light shining in the dark—prior to our accepting him as authoritative. Islam fails to understand this. God is imposed *first*. God is primarily *Allah*, all-powerful, the mightiest. Only upon accepting God’s own power can we discover that he is sustaining *our own*. This is where it becomes most evident that “God” (Allah) serves as mask of man’s will-to-power.

While in submitting to Allah the Muslim seeks a basis for his own empowerment, with Christianity God submits to worldly authorities by way of rising back to himself beyond mere will-power, in the element of pure reflection, and so as a pure act of the intellect (*intellectus agens*, or *ratio pura*). Hence the cardinal discrepancy between Islam and (classical/canonical) Christianity: the former is essentially voluntaristic; the latter, essentially rationalistic.

This must seem strange to us insofar as we are raised as moderns to take voluntarism for granted. Yet, as we purge ourselves of our modern prejudices, we begin discerning the essence of Christianity as a *spirit* that converts us from the supposed primacy of the will to a fundamental primacy of reflection. What is at stake is a conversion in terms of *orientation*, whereby we are no longer discerning our ends in legal(istic) terms, but in terms of *contemplatio/theorein*, or the “circular” spiritual movement that Aristotle announces as *nous*.

How is the question of Eve’s purity pertinent to the essential distinction between Islam and Christianity? If Eve is pure—as she is supremely in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary—then there is no need for Allah. For then we would have the disclosure of a field of contemplation, a womb of reflection in which we become participants in God’s essential movement/activity, which involves God’s own self-sacrifice. We would be invited to discover God as primordial and paradigmatic self-giver. On the other hand, if Eve were not pure, *philosophy* itself—philosophy as Socratic way of life—would be impossible. “The pagan world” must be originally *innocent* for philosophy to be capable of curing it *poetically* in the direction of a disclosure of God in the element of pure reflection.

With Islam, the pagan world is redeemable primarily in the element of *law* and/or *submission* to law. The *spirit* of law is disclosed to those who *first* submit to the law, and that spirit serves as basis for the *empowerment* of Allah’s servants. Once again, insofar as we primarily “encounter” Allah as supreme *will*, he is there to empower our own will. We may then live assuming that we are serving Allah, while *de facto* serving our own will, even and especially when we thereupon *use* “philosophy” (reason) to justify our own conduct.³³

³³ On traditional/medieval Islam’s use of philosophy, see Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 95–141. One might object that the pious Muslim should be eager to die for Allah and that *this* is a sign that the Muslim is not serving his own will. Yet, as Prince Hamlet showed incisively, what man wants on his own is nothing falling short of death, or more precisely suicide. See Andreacchio, *The Passion of Reason: Shakespeare and Ariosto as Dantean Philosophers* (New York: Peter Lang, 2026).

Philosophers might appeal to the primacy of thought over will/volition, but as long as they do not recognize the purity of Eve, or “the New Eve” (Eve renewed in the Christian God), they are left with “formulas of words” bereft of the element of certainty. What such philosophers hold as “true” (*verum*) will remain most uncertain or lacking in what is certain (*certum*). As a result, the door will remain wide open for an Islamic-like objection to philosophy, whereby an absolute certainty will be imposed to support all reason(ing): a “divine will” introduced as salvation of human freedom from its corruption.

A philosophy that does not recognize the sanctity of common sense is a philosophy that feeds inevitably into the rise of a voluntaristic world. But such is the philosophy promoted by Machiavelli and adhered to thereafter by all modern intellectuals *qua* modern. Today, such a philosophy finds its consummation in technocracy as the regime of empowerment, of the will’s “growth” or “self-affirmation” over and above all reflection. Reflection remains as *ancilla voluntatis*, a servant of the will: the will is not there to serve reflection, but to resolve reflection in the will’s own affirmation—in willpower as the truth about God. Gradually, reflection properly understood yields to a mechanistic instrument of universal self-affirmation; the only reason recognized as just is the reason of power and so of the machine. Reflection that points beyond the limits of the will is deemed, if only tacitly, heretical.

Conceiving the proper link between man and God in terms of will, the voluntarist has little appreciation for a classical, Platonic hermeneutics that seeks the divine in man’s ascent from will to intelligence. While for the modernist God is manifest in man’s will, for the classical Platonist God is manifest in man’s natural reason. These are two incompatible ways of conceiving man as “the image of God.”

Ultimately, we are faced not merely with two ways of seeing the world, but with two ways of living. In the classical-Platonic case, life is properly ascent to the divine via a natural hierarchy of ends, a “ladder of being” allowing the soul or desire to purge itself through its forms, or in search of its true, pure form. Virgin or immaculate Mary signals the inherence of purity in all (natural) forms of desire. Purity is not to be imposed upon an impure desire. Desire is not to be purged from above, or legalistically. The Christian and so Platonic alternative is unequivocal: purity illuminates desire from within, which is to say that the divine acts *naturally*. This does not preclude divine authoritative sanction—the divine *reminder* of the inherence of the divine in nature. Yet, under no circumstance should a divine will be

imposed upon man's will as essential condition for the purification of desire. The *revelation* of the divine must remain *moderated* by recognition of the primacy of the latency of the divine *in* nature over any manifestation of the divine *above* nature. Accordingly, when speaking (cautiously) of "the supernatural," canonical medieval Christianity has in mind nature's own (divine) principle of generation, as distinguished from generation as such.³⁴ Submission to a divine will should never be allowed to serve as a mask for appeals to the divine placed in the interest of all-too-human tyranny.

In or as the Virgin Mary, Eve emerges as adequate basis for the purification of man and ultimately as womb of human perfection itself. Hence the importance of the angelic Annunciation, which invites us to recognize the divine as "impregnating" nature from within. The "outer image" we have of the Archangel Gabriel should not be confused with the essential character of angelic *agency*, which, far from entailing an extrinsic imposition, denotes a most intimate *intellectual intuition*, as immediate communication proceeding from God to God. In Gabriel, God would be speaking as Father to God-as-Son. The first message the angel carries for Mary is that she is "endowed with grace" (κεχαριτωμένη, from χάρις) and in this sense God is with her (Luke 1:28), so that she is "blessed" (Εὐλογημένη, from εὐλογέω) among women: endowed with the good word (*eu-logos*). God is not with Mary "from above," but from within, as an internal gift that renders Mary a purely good model for all women/wives. Now, the angelic "logos" is said to be altogether troubling for Mary (*turbata est*), so that the angel encourages her not to fear, by noting that she has found/discovered (εὑρεῖς, he says) grace "by God" (παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ—1:29). Is grace to be found in danger? The Greek διεταράχθη, καὶ διελογίζετο, "thoroughly troubled and thoroughly reasoning," suggests that the angel has *moved* Mary to reason about what he said. Is reasoning needed to understand the angel's subsequent warning that Mary will conceive (the Greek *sun-lambano* suggests a "seizing-within")? Does the angel move Mary to conceive Jesus in the element of reason? Mary is the one who, having brought forth a son from within her womb, is to name him. While "Jesus," the name, is divinely rooted, the name is to be named by Mary, *naturally* in a *rational* context. What does this tell us about Jesus, "the savior," or the one in whom God saves? Does divine salvation come in the element of natural reason—of a reason that springs forth out of a pristine nature in accordance with a rational plan, or

³⁴ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, Q. 31, art. 5.

providentially? Is natural reason a divine gift saving us from fear? Is our reason to be purged in light of a natural paradigm announced in the Gospels? Do the Gospels warn us against the corruption of reason and about the importance of our returning to a pristine reason as the activity we are originally or divinely moved to?

The angel's message unfolds to indicate that the reason/*logos* that can save us from fear—thus the *good (eu)* reason—is to be named by Mary insofar as God speaks within or from within her. The “name” (*nomen/ὄνομα*—1:31) is of importance, here; for the name carries the weight of authority—as *law (nomos)*. Do the Gospels call us to discover law in conformity with natural reason? Is law to be understood as justified in a divine reason that speaks in nature? Is Gabriel other than Jesus prior to his being named? Is Jesus Gabriel under a law arising out of a nature uncontaminated by the stain affecting all women who are not Mary? In Gabriel do we behold the light of reason poetically displayed as link between God and the law? Is Gabriel the annunciation itself of Jesus? Does Gabriel beg to be born as Jesus? Is Mary impregnated by the voice personified by Gabriel—a voice that speaks “from within” even as *we* are given to imagine it “without”?³⁵ Is Gabriel a message in search of a pure womb, a stage on which (or out of which) the message may be displayed authoritatively? Can Gabriel speak to crowds only in the person of Jesus? Is the “salvation” addressed by the Gospels at once theological and political? Is this not what Luke 1:33 suggests when anticipating Jesus's reign over the house of Jacob “forever” (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας) or in a kingdom without end (*et regnabit in domo Jacob in aeternum, et regni ejus non erit finis*)? Is Jesus's reign what every reign is in God?

If Jesus marks the theological roots of all political life and order, the revelation of those roots must find a suitable womb, one receptive to its divine mandate. Without Mary, the Gospel (Good News) would lend itself to be heard as a tyrannical imposition. Purity in the midst of human corruption is to be found as a privileged place in which nature “discovers” (Luke 1:29) God within, even in the midst of rampant corruption.

Are we to understand that there is an ineradicable purity in the soul, in which alone God's *presence* is recognized? Would “Mary” name a natural “clearing” (to speak with María Zambrano) constituting a necessary condition for the salvation of corrupt nations and corrupt

³⁵ To Mary's spiritual impregnation corresponds the spiritual nature of Christ's birth. See St. Ambrose of Milan, [Letter 42.6](#), esp. with ref. to Ezekiel 45:1–4. The Bishop stresses that Mary is virgin not merely in conceiving, but also in giving birth (*parituram virginem...virgo concepit et genuit*).

souls, alike. Is Jesus the light that, descending directly from God, is born among men in a place of dialogue/*logos* (Matthew 18:20) untainted by our corruption and lest the *polis* fall as Sodom (Genesis 18:26-33, Matthew 11:23, Luke 17:29, Romans 9:29)?

Gabriel's promise of an everlasting reign cutting through all corruption does not suggest any equivalence between the house of Jacob and Sodom, but it does warn about the dividing line separating the two (Genesis 13:13-17). The house of Jacob can avoid the fate of Sodom in virtue of its recognition of the divine light shining from within it. Conversely, our fall into chaos would coincide with the obscuring of a *logos* that ties man naturally to the divine (Luke 1:35).

The difficulty raised by Mary in Luke 1:34 is at once theological, pertaining as it does to divine agency in nature (how can she have a child if she "knows no man"?), and political, pertaining as it does to a royal lineage (how can authority be secured without man's mediation?). Gabriel's answer is in effect that royal lineage is defined directly by God, or that man is generated by God prior to being generated by another man. Yet again this is possible only insofar as God finds or illuminates a place—a womb—open to God's presence: an opening in an otherwise obscure world. But is that opening not itself created by light itself? Does the divine spirit plunge into darkness to establish the kingdom that St. Augustine would call *civitas dei*? This is a reign defined by reason-in-nature, a reason that marks the distinction between man and beast; hence St. Augustine's *ubi primum occurrit aliquid quod non sit nobis commune et pecori, hoc ad rationem pertinet*: "this place where something occurs that we do not have in common with cattle, pertains to reason."³⁶

We are called here to partake in reason-in-nature, or natural reason, as that which defines what is properly human—setting the human aside with respect to all other animals. But this reason that hides in nature is proclaimed in the Gospels as the savior of the house (*oikos/domus*) of Jacob: reason calls men to live in a house open to reason, a society open to reason in nature, a reason defining our civility. The everlasting kingdom that Gabriel invokes would then be the order of nature over which unfolds the temporal course of nations.

³⁶ Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 15 a. 1 s. c. 8, paraphrasing St. Augustine, *De trinitate*. 12.3.3. For an alternative paraphrase replacing "reason" with "mind," see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 55, a. 4, arg. 3. In Q. 15, a. 1, obj. 10, Aquinas cites Boethius's *De consolacione*, Bk. 5, to the effect that reason (*ratio*) is proper to mankind as pure intelligence (*intelligentia sola*) belongs to the divine (obj. 11 confirms that what is meant by "intellect" is the divine root of deliberative reason).

This is not, to be sure, an order determined by dark or unbridled passions, but one governed by a divine mind, as the mind of nature—the mind underlying all generation.³⁷

Our modern upbringing tends to obscure the classical sense of “nature” evoked by the Gospels. For we are raised to relate to nature either “romantically” in the element of feelings, or “scientifically”/mechanistically in terms of abstract/symbolic formulas, only to be driven to a synthesis of the two aspects of nature (the “irrational” and the “rational”) divined as a Rational Society of Machiavellian extraction in which the mere-conflict between (irrational) nature and law (“reason of State”) yields to an open-ended process of *rationalizing* the irrational, or of channeling and controlling unreason, where the irrational is integrated into the system of cunning we call technocracy.

Being raised to take for granted the modern split between the rational and the irrational, we tend to conceive divine reason in voluntaristic terms, as a will beyond all human reason (which is “abstracted” from nature). The typically Kantian appeal to the irreducibility of nature to mere *res extensa* should not distract us from the Deist character of modern religiosity. In formally allowing for divine transcendence (viz. the sublime, or the noumenon), Kant set the stage for the triumph or radicalization of medieval voluntarism. Reason becomes strictly instrumental (read, Machiavellian) insofar as it can no longer be purely *natural*. While promising to save “nature” (including human nature) from being subsumed under the category of law, Kant strips nature of any capacity to *guide* our reason. Nature loses all authority, allowing us to *pretend* to do justice to nature’s irreducibility to merely-mechanical forces by positing *hypothetical* meaning in nature, such that would justify or support our modern reason/freedom. What is meaningful in nature is now conceived as an “ideal” (a formal “as if” or *als ob*) supporting the progress of instrumental reason in bringing about a “Kingdom of Ends” (Kant’s *Reich der Zwecke*), a realm in which freedom is fully realized in its legal/nominal formulas, these being “perfected” as pure expressions of what Rousseau would call a “general will” (*volonté générale*).

Evidently, modern reason stands at the antipodes of the Platonism of the Gospels. The purity of nature reflecting the divine perfection of the understanding (*intellectus*) is replaced by the purity of laws expressive of a modern will, or of the auto-determination of all those who consider man as supremely responsible to contribute to the establishment of a perfectly

³⁷ This is the central theme of Vico’s *Principi di Scienza Nuova*, especially the work’s final paragraphs.

rational society, a society in which man's will triumphs over God's will in the act of appealing to God's will as supreme guarantor of man's own.

The Virgin Mary is at war with the cunning of modernity, which unfolds to obscure the reason that Mary opens her womb to. Standing on a Cartesian-like act of self-determination, our new/modern reason trades classical maturity for progressive *complexity*; substance for vistas; soul for diversity; the concentric for the eccentric. The surface is now everything, or at least all that we are allowed to speak of, to paraphrase Wittgenstein. The Virgin crushes our superficiality as the head of a serpentine cunning that distracts us from the fundamental problems of life. Our superficiality is exposed as demonic insofar as demons are angels fallen into superficiality—*literalist* messengers that seek to reduce spiritual depths to carnal/textual surfaces, and so the journey of the mind in God (*itinerarium mentis in deum*, per St. Bonaventure) to “growth” away from God—growth as the Faustian prize for falling out of grace.

It is in our own truest interest that Mary, as New Eve, counters the demonic spirit of superficiality heralded by modern man as *conditio sine qua non* of our indefinite progress. For such a progress is coextensive with our growing forgetfulness of the reason why we should be idolizing our ideals, a forgetfulness that drives modern man mercilessly to being crushed by his own satanic logic, incapable of distinguishing himself from the spirit that has led him astray. So it is that in crushing the Serpent, Eve's spirit crushes what we have become, or failed to *be*. It is in light of her perfect son, the son that the divine mind awakens Eve to disclose for us, that Eve is renewed triumphant above *all* evil.

The early 13th c. Marian antiphon *Salve Regina* is most pertinent, insofar as it evokes the Virgin Mary as compassionate royal Mother of praying “sons of Eve exiled ... in this valley of tears” (*exsules filii Hevae ... in hac lacrimarum valle*). What is compassionate is the Queen's “eyes,” which we are to pray for. What saves us from our exile is the New Eve's gaze, which allows *us* to see Jesus as the blessed fruit of Mary's womb (*benedictus fructus ventris Mariae*). It is not enough for “sweet Virgin Mary” (*dulcis Virgo Maria*) to guard against the Serpent. We must come to see with her eyes, not only for the sake of avoiding or driving back evil, but for the sake of recognizing—in the aftermath of our exile from Mary's pure sight (*post hoc exilium*)—Mary's blessed fruit as the living Word.

We begin to see, here, why Protestant protestations against Catholic invocations of Mary as savior are misguided. In the *Salve Regina* we need to recover the New Eve's eyes in order to see the Savior who is given to us *in principium*, though we could no longer see him. For one cannot see Jesus with impure eyes, or eyes obscured with evil. Mary's compassionate eyes are invoked so that their gaze may be directed downward to our mortal condition, as openings through which we may behold our Savior. Only thus may we recover the purity of vision required to see its proper form—the living truth.³⁸

Most pertinent is Bernard of Clairvaux's *Memorare* ("Remember"), where the suppliant asks for Mary's help and support (*auxilia* and *suffragia*, both in the plural), with the implication that our sin coincides with our having abandoned (*derelictum*) an authority capable of hearing/heeding the suffering of its subjects. Mary is to lend her hearing by way of continually helping and supporting *our own* hearing of the Living Word—though, naturally, Mary's help is itself contingent upon our prayer.³⁹ For the door is opened to those who knock, so that in asking for Mary's help, far from being intent upon bending the divine will to our own, we open ourselves, our own will, to a light purging us of all compulsion, of all confusion. This message is confirmed in the Marian antiphon, *Regina Caeli*, where we are to rejoice through Mary's rejoicing in the divine's keeping the promise of resurrection (*surrexit Dominus vere*). "Truly has the Lord resurrected": this is to say that the Lord's earthly authority was well grounded; that it had a heavenly counterpart; that it was truly *natural*, rather than merely conventional. The Lord's authority is effective in nature or death, even more so than it is in our fallen world of conventions alienated from nature. The Lord can thus be trusted even in our "valley of tears". There is no need to trust a God who does not descend into our world. Yet, neither should the Christian trust a worldly king claiming to owe his worldly power or success to God. What is to be trusted in practical terms is the Cross, rather

³⁸ In what sense can a "word" be *seen*? It is often said that the Hebrews stood for the primacy of hearing, while the Greeks stood for the primacy of seeing. In the Gospels, which are the Torah for the world, the living Word or Logos (in *Purgatorio* 10.95, Dante speaks of "visible speech"—*visibile parlare*) coincides with the vision of the word that is heard. What is heard, the secret of the Torah, is manifest. Yet, the manifestation is not conclusive insofar as it remains Logos, a verb, an articulation, even an art. Christ represents the art of nature itself: the art of appearing by way of disappearing; the art of hiding in the act of exposing oneself. The Gospels teach that the loftiest vision that the Greeks are capable of falls short of the pure manifestation of what is not apparent, and that such a manifestation is a pointer back to what is by nature hidden; they teach, or invite us to understand that what we see is a sign of what we have heard prior to seeing anything, and so of what we see in hearing long before we see on our own.

³⁹ The Virgin's "support" (*suffragium*) entails an election: we are supported by being chosen for heeding the Word manifest to us through the Virgin.

than the worldly sword: the Cross signaling the manner in which the divine enters into our valley of tears; the Cross as vehicle for an ascent to authority in nature; the Cross, not as mere passivity, but as *transformation* or *immolation* of the earthly unto the heavenly; the Cross as site of *translation* of what is below us, into what is above us; the Cross as vehicle of our purgation out of darkness; the Cross as a crusading *spiritual* sword—as *word*—cutting through the curtain of violence to expose it reflectively to the light of the understanding, of discovery of meaning in nature.

The God entering our world on a Cross is the God who has deigned to illuminate our world with the joy of resurrection (*Deus, qui per resurrectionem Filii tui, Domini nostri Iesu Christi, mundum laetificare dignatus es...*). Why “deigned”? For the resurrection can be exposed only through a *condescensio*, a descent within our valley of tears. God no longer awaits on a mountaintop in the respect that his presence, his spirit is universally announced in laws. The spirit comes forth to redeem laws from serving as instruments of alienation from spirit, or as masks of violence allowing us to live *as if* there were peace. Spirit is “the new law” or “law renewed” in the sense that spirit (re)appropriates law for itself, showing us that the law’s proper function is to announce spirit—to bespeak law’s inherence in nature as spirit. This is law as a *poetic form*, a mirror of things that are not evident to us (*non apparentium*).

Now, if law is in nature as spirit, civil law is to be understood as emerging out of nature. Hence the importance of Mary as “Nourishing Mother of the Redeemer” (*Alma Redemptoris Mater*), providing permanent access (as *porta*/“gate” that “stays viable”/*manet pervia*) to the heavens as a “star” in the sea of death, sustaining the dying who care to ascend out of death (*pervia caeli porta manes, et stella maris, succurre cadenti, surgere qui curat*). God nourishes us in nature as Mary is the light that reminds us sweetly (with *dulcedo*, to return to the antiphon, *Salve Regina*)—as the sweetest poetry—of our heavenly destiny in the darkest hour.

Mary’s natural nourishing virtue is, of course, announced to the world with respect to Jesus, the perfect man. Thus does the antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater* read: “you who, Nature marveling, gave birth to your saintly Parent” (*tu quæ genuisti, Natúra miránte, tuum sanctum Genitórem*), adding that Mary remained a Virgin before *and* after she had been “saluted” directly by Gabriel’s mouth. What is of pivotal significance here is the reference to nature: nature marvels, not merely aside from the birthing of the parent, but *as* that very

birthing. In Mary nature herself is marvelous, awakening our “virgin”/pure sight to our heavenly destiny. Mary is the opening of nature to a light crossing her eternally—“from God to God”. As such, Mary is not merely impregnated by God through his angelic light, for in the act of being impregnated, Mary rises as “Lady of Angels” (*Domina Angelorum*) to cite the *Ave Regina caelorum*: “the door through which the light of the world springs forth” (*porta, ex qua mundo lux est orta*).

In or as the New Eve, nature herself is renewed. No longer a mere valley of the dying, nature emerges marvelously to our own sight as womb of eternal life. Thanks to Mary, what is hidden can become apparent to us; for what is eternally hidden in nature, what hides by its very nature—as truth (*aletheia*) is disclosed paradoxically only in “otherworldly” hiding—is spontaneously *named* for the salvation of all nations. Indeed, the Gospels attest to that *natural* naming, a naming that springs divinely out of nature as the form illuminating the Gospels themselves. Such, as we have seen, is natural reason insofar as it appears with poetic humility under the law to awaken us, ordinary subjects of the law, to an altogether otherworldly vision, a pure understanding that serves as essential condition for all worldly vision.