

The Primacy of Christ:
A Theological Foundation

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Abstract

One of the questions that Catholic theologians have debated for centuries pertains to the true meaning behind St. Paul's statement, "that in all things, he [Christ] may have the first place [primacy]" (Colossians 1:18). The beginning stages of the debate presented it as a counter-factual claim concerning whether the God-man would have come had Adam and Eve not sinned. One position suggested that the Incarnation was directed toward redemption and gave a negative answer; the opposing position stated that Christ's primacy spoken of by St. Paul was not dependent on anything outside of God's will, and gave a positive answer.

This thesis seeks to examine the work of the major contributors to both sides of the debate, starting with St. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* and closing with the work of Bl. John Duns Scotus. In doing this, it will examine in what ways the question developed throughout the Church's history, what the major contributors to the question truly sought to answer in engaging the question, and why it became such a central and foundational question for the major theologians involved in the debate. What will be seen through this method is that, though the question began as a hypothetical concerning an alternate economy of salvation, theologians like St. Bonaventure and Bl. John Duns Scotus moved it beyond its hypothetical formulation by recognizing that it actually concerned two opposing theological viewpoints on the Incarnation and created universe. The conclusions of this thesis will further show how, at this point, the hypothetical can only obscure the true nature of the question since it does not recognize how fundamentally it affects our understanding of the economy of salvation. It will also show that method has played a role in how the question is approached and answered throughout the Church's history.

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Introduction

The Hebrew Scriptures teach that God has always sought to live in an intimate relationship with the human race. This began with God's creative act, became explicit through his call to Abraham and the nation of Israel, and Christians believe the fullness of God's revelation has been received in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet, “even if revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.”¹

The Church's attempts to grasp the full significance of God's revelation gave rise to a question concerning the relationship between the Incarnation and God's creative act. In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul proclaims Christ as the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and invisible. . . All things have been created through him and for him . . . that in all things he himself might be preeminent” (Col 1:15-20). A complementary statement is found in his letter to the Ephesians, where he says we were “chosen in Christ before the foundations of the world” (Eph 1:4). What these two verses suggest is that Christ, the Incarnate God, exercises a primacy in God's creative act. This means that the second person of the Trinity acted not only as the alpha and omega of creation, but was always intended to be its center point as well. While this truth seems simple enough to accept, its meaning and place in Catholic thought has been debated for centuries.

The debate began early on as an issue concerning the necessity of the Incarnation and passion of Christ, and it was commonly expressed from the perspective of a hypothetical question, “If man had not sinned, would God have become incarnate?”

¹ *Catechism of The Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., sec. 65-66.

While many attribute the origins of this debate to St. Anselm, the counter-factual claim is often attributed to his contemporary Rupert of Deutz, though this may be disputed as St. Augustine used a similar expression before Rupert.² Many thinkers found little value in proving a counter-factual claim because it concerned an alternate economy of salvation. They felt more comfortable dealing with the reality of sin in the present economy of salvation, and found it much easier to accept the Anselmian position that the Incarnation was primarily directed toward man's salvation. This opinion will evolve into the Thomistic thesis because of how ardently it is defended by Thomists. The opposing school following Rupert, who applies an absolute primacy to Christ in that he would have become Incarnate with or without the first sin, will evolve into the Franciscan thesis as it was mostly defended and developed through the work of the Franciscan Order.³

I will argue that an analysis of the historical development of Catholic thought on this question reveals that the contributions of many theologians throughout the centuries, but especially St. Bonaventure and Bl. John Duns Scotus, reveal that something much more fundamental is at stake than a hypothetical question. To reduce it to the perspective of a counter-factual claim obscures the full meaning of the debate. It follows from this that the question provides an essential theological foundation for our understanding of God and the created universe. These men did not seek to understand what would have been in an alternate economy of salvation, but to defend a worldview that is foundational

² Rupert of Deutz, *De Gloria et honore Filii homini Super Mattheum* 13 (CCCM 29: 415); cf. Daniel P. Horan, OFM, "How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation? Reconsidering the History of the Absolute Predestination of Christ in Light of Robert Grosseteste," *Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 3 (May 2011): 375; cf. Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine: Sermons*, "Sermon 174, 2," ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., and trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 258.

³ Fr. Maximilian Mary Dean, FI, *A Primer on the Absolute Primacy of Christ: Blessed John Duns Scotus and the Franciscan thesis* (Bedford, MA: Franciscans of the Immaculate, 2006) 9-10; Horan, "How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?," 374.

for the whole of theology within the present economy of salvation. The significance of the Incarnation within the context of a freely created universe constitutes both the center-point of revelation and the beginning for further theological investigation for many of these men.

To demonstrate this I will first give a description of the origins and logic behind the two opposing schools and how they initially developed along the lines of the hypothetical. Next, I will attempt to show its development through the work of the Franciscans, and why St. Bonaventure, in light of his overall theological system, felt it more profitable to affirm Anselm's school as opposed to that originating with Rupert of Deutz. Through this, the significance of St. Bonaventure's shift away from the hypothetical will come to light. The brief work of St. Thomas Aquinas will be seen as an affirmation for these Bonaventurian contributions. Third, I will show the principles behind Scotus' opposition toward the school following Anselm, and how his work on the question would affect his entire theological system. What will be accomplished through this process is an understanding of why the question should not be passed over as a medieval hypothetical thought experiment. It is the claim of this study that the question of the primacy of Christ is not superficial but touches upon fundamental principles surrounding God's freedom, the world's contingency, and, as will be shown, the significant role methodology plays in any theological investigation. It will also be clear how this debate concerns two opposing worldviews foundational for Christian theology and the understanding of the Incarnation's significance in God's eternal plan.

Chapter 1: Origins of the Question

St. Anselm (ca. 1033-1109)

St. Anselm was not the first to approach the question concerning Christ's primacy or the necessity of the Incarnation. The earliest indications of any theological perspectives relating to this Christological issue can be found in the thought of many Church Fathers. St. Maximus the Confessor provides a particularly clear example:

This is the great and hidden mystery, at once the blessed end [*teleos*] for which all things are ordained. It is the divine purpose conceived before the beginning of created beings. In defining it we would say that this mystery is the preconceived goal for which everything exists, but which itself exists on account of nothing. With a clear view to this end, God created the essences of created beings, and such is, properly speaking, the terminus of his providence and of the things under his providential care. Inasmuch as it leads to God, it is the recapitulation of the things he has created. It is the mystery which circumscribes all the ages, and which reveals the grand plan of God (c.f. Ephesians 1:10-11), a super-infinite plan infinitely preexisting the ages. . . . Because of Christ-or rather, the whole mystery of Christ-all the ages of time and the beings within those ages have received their beginning and end in Christ This union has been made manifest in Christ at the end of time, and in itself brings God's foreknowledge to fulfillment. . . .⁴

Here Christ, the Incarnate Word, is said to be the end which God had in mind when he created all creatures. It is explicitly stated that Christ was foreknown (thus predestined) to be the beginning and fulfillment of all things created. All of this is evidence that Maximus anticipated many elements of the arguments used by Rupert of Deutz, Robert Grosseteste, Bonaventure, and John Duns Scotus in support of their position on the primacy of Christ.

⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus The Confessor*, "Ad Thalassium 60," trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 124-125. In any quote concerning this issue, Christ is taken to be a reference to the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity. Any reference to the Word is taken to mean the second person of the Trinity apart from the Incarnation, unless it explicitly specified otherwise.

Earlier than Maximus, St. Augustine too anticipated the debate that will originate in the work of St. Anselm and Rupert of Deutz. Though St. Augustine is commonly noted as affirming the position that Christ would not have come if man had not sinned, he considered the Incarnation to be a fitting means for the whole human person, body and soul, to achieve beatitude apart from sin.⁵

With St. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, the necessity and fittingness of the Incarnation became explicitly a topic of debate. Anselm understood the Incarnation within a specific context that will become foundational for the further development of theological thought in the West. This is one of the reasons he has become the most notable starting point for any discussion of Christ's primacy in Western theology.⁶ Directed toward critics of the Christian faith, *Cur Deus Homo* sought to provide a rational explanation for the necessity of Christ's Incarnation and death on the Cross without compromising attributes of God's nature. As Boso, Anselm's dialogue partner, states in Book I, Chapter 4 of *Cur Deus Homo*:

All these things are beautiful [the truths of our faith that show us how fitting it was for God to redeem us through the God-man] and they have to be treated like pictures. But if there is nothing sturdy underneath them, unbelievers do not think they provide a sufficient explanation for why we ought to believe that God willed to undergo the things we say he underwent. . . One must first demonstrate the *rational* solidity of the truth: that is, the necessity that proves that God should or could have humbled Himself to the things that we proclaim about Him. Only then should we

⁵ Corey L. Barnes, "Necessary, Fitting, or Possible: The Shape of Scholastic Christology," *Nova Et Vetera* (English ed.) 10, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 657-688; cf. Francis Xavier Pancheri, O.F.M. Conv., S.T.D., *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, trans. Juniper B. Carol O.F.M., S.T.D. (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Publications, 1984), 13, 18, 122. Pancheri lists St. Irenaeus, St. Athanasius, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Cyril of Alexandria as examples of Fathers who defended what he calls the "physical theory" of the Incarnation—a point he states "paved the way to an open statement on the theology of Christ's primacy." He also lists St. Augustine and St. Bernard as suggesting the Incarnation was fitting apart from sin.

⁶ Horan, "How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?," 374.

expound on considerations of fittingness as pictures of this truth.⁷

In the upcoming chapters, especially Chapter 6, Anselm elaborates upon the criticisms that unbelievers are presenting that concern the way in which God redeemed man. These criticisms mimic Anselm's belief that previous accounts of atonement do not adequately explain the necessity of Christ's death on the Cross, because they compromise God's essential attributes of omnipotence, wisdom, love and goodness.⁸ Such confusion is seen in Boso's line of questioning at the very beginning of the theological work. "I am asking you to explain something to me that, as you know, many others are asking along with me: given that God is omnipotent, by what necessity and reason did he assume the lowliness and weakness of human nature in order to restore human nature?"⁹ Boso goes on to explain that present accounts of atonement seem to violate the divine attributes, such as His omnipotence, since He could have accomplished human redemption simply through His word. They are counter to His wisdom since a great person would not do with great assertion what can be done with little. They seem to call into question His love as human redemption could have been achieved in a less painful way. And not least, they call into question His goodness, for God condemned the innocent Christ in order to save the guilty sinner.¹⁰

To Anselm, the purpose God had in creating the human person with a rational nature is so humanity may know and enjoy Him [God] the *summum Bonum* the greatest

⁷ Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, "Cur Deus Homo," ed. and trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 250.

⁸ M. A. McIntyre, B.D., *St. Anselm and His Critics: A Re-Interpretation of the Cur Deus Homo* (London, England: Oliver and Boyd: Tweeddale Court, 1954), 60.

⁹ Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 245.

¹⁰ McIntyre, *St. Anselm and His Critics*, 59; Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 250.

Good. As M.A. McIntyre observes, “St. Anselm uses the strongest terms possible to emphasize the fact that man was endowed with rationality for the purpose of remembering, understanding and loving the *summum Bonum*. His devotion to the highest Good, which is also the supreme reality, is a pursuit which is for him [man] unending and it fills the whole of his living.”¹¹ Man is also regarded as being created upright or inherently moral; for part of being rational is the ability to discern what is good and evil, right and wrong, and between the lesser good and the greater good. Thus, McIntyre further explains that “rational nature has been created for the purpose of discerning, desiring, and following the good, so that the person may come to enjoy God.”¹² It is morally imperative for man to subordinate his rational nature to the will of the Creator who endowed him with such a nature for a specific reason. To not do so, is an affront to God because it is a failure to fulfill his purpose, thus doing God a dishonor. Sin for Anselm is the failure of “man to subordinate the *whole* of his *rational* will or heart to God, his Creator. . .”¹³

Through his disobedience in the Garden of Eden, man fell out of favor with God, and incurred a debt which humanity had to pay. McIntyre characterizes Anselm's position thus: “it is clear that St. Anselm has taken up the idea that God expects moral obedience as a debt due to Him by His creatures, and that failure to obey puts the sinner in a state of debt.”¹⁴ Anselm believes that in order to undo this dishonor, man must not only pay to God the honor or obedience which is due to Him, but he must also give something

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 63.

¹³ Ibid., 66.

¹⁴ Ibid., 87.

additional to amend the dishonor he had shown God.

If someone injures another's health, it is not enough for him to restore the other person's health unless he also makes recompense for the damage he inflicted by causing pain. In the same way, if someone violates another's honor, it is not enough for him to pay back that honor if he does not also offer something satisfactorily to the one he has dishonored, as a compensation for the harm he caused by dishonoring him.¹⁵

The debt of paying God further honor for the injury done requires that the creature give something greater than what is contained in creation, which can only be God Himself. For man already owes to God all that he has as a debt apart from sin and thus cannot give anything of himself or that he possesses as a further payment to amend the honor due to God.¹⁶

In an effort to understand the context for this theory of atonement and satisfaction, scholars suggest that the practice of private law in Anselm's day could be a possible basis. They point specifically to the feudal model of satisfaction operative at that time.¹⁷ Under feudal law, if a person harms or injures the health of another person, they are then required to not only restore such a person to full health, but to provide a gift or additional action to amend the harm which was done. Such a gift or action must be proportionate to the injury, and the nature of the gift depends upon the person harmed.¹⁸ In the case of man's sin against God, not only must the human race pay the debt which is owed, i.e., full subordination to the will of God, but humanity must pay an additional honor to amend or make satisfaction for the offense committed in disobeying God's command.

¹⁵ Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 262.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 279-284.

¹⁷ Horan, "How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?," 374.

¹⁸ McIntyre, *St. Anselm and His Critics*, 76.

The problem Anselm foresees in all this, and which he sets out to overcome, is the inability of any man to make satisfaction for so grave an offense as one committed against God. It is God's nature as infinite that brings this inability clearly into focus. Since God is infinite, the gravity of any offense against His personal honor, no matter how small, is magnified to such a degree that Anselm believes it would be better for a person to allow the whole universe to be destroyed than to commit the smallest sin against God.¹⁹ As McIntyre states, "The reason could be found conceivably in the legal standards of St. Anselm's day, according to which the gravity of the crime varied in direct proportion to the dignity of the person injured. So great is the dignity of God that any sin is exceedingly great."²⁰ In this case, where the honor of God is harmed, the gravity of the offense is infinite. Nevertheless, satisfaction must still be made by a member of the human race.

Before moving forward, Anselm realizes he must give an explanation as to why it is not appropriate for God to simply forgive the debt incurred by man's sin. As Boso points out, such a statement would make sense considering God commands man to forgive one another and He is said to be so kind that nothing kinder could be imagined.²¹ Despite these claims, Anselm holds very firmly that God cannot simply forgive sin and let the unrighteous go free without punishment. Man must make satisfaction for the dishonor that he has caused God. If this obligation is not fulfilled, then God is forced to punish man's sin so as not to compromise His justice. Either man makes satisfaction for

¹⁹ Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 281-282.

²⁰ McIntyre, *St. Anselm and His Critics*, 78.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

his sin, which man cannot do, or God punishes man for sinning. If none of this happens, the sinful and the sinless would receive the exact same treatment from God which is incompatible with justice. Furthermore, to not punish one who has violated the moral order which God has purposely placed in creation is an additional injustice unto God since it disregards His moral law.²² God must see to it that man either makes satisfaction for sin, or punishes the human race in order to safeguard His perfect justice. As McIntyre explains, “St. Anselm concludes that since it is impossible for God to exercise His liberty, His Will, His kindness except within the limits of what is just and right. He cannot forgive the sinner without punishing him. . . In short, it is the fact that non-punishment or forgiveness of sins is intolerable in a morally ordered universe that forms the ground for its rejection.”²³

A final aspect of Anselm's premise for why God became man to save the human race is the necessity for God to save the human race, though he is clearly uncomfortable with using the term “necessary” in describing any of God's actions.²⁴ Whatever God does by necessity, as Anselm will explain, He does so in order to maintain His own integrity. It is a necessity imposed upon Him by His own nature and attributes; it is imposed from within Himself, and so is itself an attribute of God. God must bring about the salvation of man because it is in His nature to perfect His creation; and He must see to it that the purpose for which He has created the universe is not disrupted by human sin.²⁵

²² Ibid., 96-114.

²³ Ibid., 99.

²⁴ Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 292-293. Anselm uses the Latin “necessitas, necessitatis” for necessity in this context.

²⁵ McIntyre, *St. Anselm and His Critics*, 118.

After establishing all this, Anselm believes he has provided an adequate premise for explaining why it was necessary for the second person of the Trinity to take upon Himself human flesh and die upon the Cross for our sins. The God-man [*Deus Homo*] was necessary to make satisfaction for the offense committed against the honor of God through sin.²⁶ It was necessary because in no other way could a member of the human race make an adequate offering to God which would satisfy the dishonor caused by his disobedience. Since Christ is God, his offering is the offering of an infinite person; but since he was truly a man, Christ was able to offer himself in the name of the human race. As McIntyre puts it, “St. Anselm suggests that the argument of Book I has proved not only the impossibility of man's saving himself but also the necessity of salvation by Jesus Christ.”²⁷ The remainder of Book II is devoted to demonstrating this latter claim, that human redemption can only be accomplished by Jesus Christ. As St. Anselm will say, Christ's “death is proportionate to his person,” making the value of Christ's offering infinitely greater than all that exists apart from God. This is a necessary aspect of the satisfaction that must be made to God, and the reason why redemption could not be achieved through any other member of the human race.²⁸

Cur Deus Homo's explanation for the necessity of Christ's Incarnation and act of redemption is unique for its time, but it is Christ's atonement and not the Incarnation that is of direct concern for Anselm. That is why Anselm's treatment of the Incarnation is naturally conditioned by human sinfulness. This position, which reduces the purpose of

²⁶ Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 264-265. Anselm uses the Latin “aufert,” a form of the verb “aufero” which means to take, withdraw, or steal away.

²⁷ McIntyre, *St. Anselm and His Critics*, 115.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116, 121; Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 293-294.

Christ's Incarnation to redemption, became known in theology as hamartiocentrism.²⁹ Francis Xavier Pancheri believes that “St. Anselm imprinted here a precise and rigorous direction. The 'Father of Scholasticism' was truly the notable starting point for the doctrine of the primacy in Latin theology and conditioned it profoundly. . . . The *hamartiocentric* mentality was, then, the clue to understanding every theological problem, including that of Christ's primacy.”³⁰ By failing to supply any reason for the Incarnation besides human sinfulness, Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* provides a foundational aspect for Christology and sets a precedent for future thought in Catholic theology. His *Cur Deus Homo* becomes the theological basis for what is later known as the Thomistic thesis.

Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075-1135)

Writing in the late 11th, early 12th Centuries, Rupert of Deutz is considered an original thinker much like St. Anselm. However, while the influence of Anselm is noteworthy, the work of Rupert has gotten little attention even among those who defend his position on the primacy of Christ.³¹ Part of the reason for the lack of attention that he gets is the method he utilizes. Joseph Ratzinger discusses this point in his book *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*. “As a thinker, Rupert has received too little attention in the past. In a way that is somewhat foreign to the academic science of his own time, he attempted to penetrate to the spirit of the Scriptures by way of meditation

²⁹ Ibid., 56-116; Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 14.

³⁰ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 14.

³¹ Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?,” 377.

rather than by way of the Scholastic methodology.”³² This approach had a significant influence on Rupert's conclusions and his refusal to accept St. Anselm's hamartiocentric understanding of the Incarnation. Rupert's work, though perhaps the first to oppose Anselm's thesis, was not widely disseminated in the years that followed his death. However, his formulation and argumentation gives good indication of the prominence the question had in the theological world at that time.

Around the year 1127, toward the end of Rupert's life, Rudolph of Trond made a request to Rupert to address disputed questions concerning the Trinity and the necessity of the Incarnation. Rudolph's commission was the motivation behind Rupert's decision to devote the last book of his *De gloria et honore Filii hominis Super Mattheum* to these considerations. It is here that he develops his opinions on the issue of Christ's primacy.³³ One of the primary motivations behind Rudolf's request was the Jewish denial of the Incarnation. Both Rudolf and Rupert had contact with Jewish scholars and were familiar with their arguments. Their claim was that the Christian position concerning the necessity of the Incarnation violated the immutability of God's will. As John Van Engen explains concerning Rupert's adversaries, “The Jews . . . directed their sharpest attacks against any notion that God had become flesh and suffered death. As St. Paul said long before (1 Cor 1:23), this was a 'scandal' to them: The Jews charged in particular that this 'new covenant' with its 'new plan of salvation' represented a change of mind and therefore fickleness or unreliability in the will of a supposedly immutable God.”³⁴ Thus these Jews thought that

³² Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History In St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), 97.

³³ Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?”, 377.

³⁴ John H. Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 353-354.

the Incarnation was unnecessary because God had already established a covenant with his people to which He would remain reliably faithful.

In response to these Jewish scholars, Rupert expressed his frustration and annoyance at certain Churchmen who thought it was necessary to have God will evil in order to show the necessity of Christ's Incarnation and passion.³⁵ The problem with this for Rupert, as Van Engen informs us, is: “if God did not will evil and set the whole plan in motion, then Christ's Incarnation represented a 'new plan' (*nouum concilium*), a change of untold magnitude in the divine operation. . .”³⁶ God's foreknowledge also played a significant role in Rupert's explanation of the necessity of Christ's Incarnation and passion. He believed that God foreknew of man's fall into sin and of His ultimate intervention through the Incarnation and passion of His only begotten Son. However, Rupert makes an important distinction in that the fall of man God “foreknew and *permitted*,” but the Incarnation He “foreknew and *foreordained*.”³⁷

Van Engen believes there are two specific problems with earlier expositions on this issue which Rupert sought to correct. “The first problem with earlier expositions was many authorities believed that to demonstrate the necessity of the Incarnation one inevitably concludes that God must have willed evil.”³⁸ This was a very serious issue for Rupert, who found himself in the midst of a major controversy with two French masters

³⁵ Rupert of Deutz, *Corpus Christianourm Continuatio Mediaevalis XXIX: Ruperti Tuitiensis, De gloria et honore Filii hominis super Mattheum*, ed. Hrabanum Haacke O.S.B. (Turnholth: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1979), 412.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 355.

³⁷ Rupert of Deutz, *Corpus Christianourm Continuatio Mediaevalis XXIX*, 415; cf. Rupert of Deutz, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Rupertus Abbas Monasterii S. Heriberti Tuitiensis Opera Omnia*, Vol. IV (Parisii: J.P. Migne editorem, 1854), 153-156.

³⁸ Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?,” 378.

around the year 1116 AD. The controversy arose when one of Rupert's brethren at St. Lawrence acknowledged that Master Anselm of Laon held a view on the will of God which Rupert found to be unacceptable and led to his writing of *De voluntate Dei*.³⁹ In this treatise, Rupert publicly challenged not just Master Anselm of Laon but also Bishop William of Champeaux, two luminaries of France, for he believed that both of these men attributed evil to the will of God for the sake of a greater good.⁴⁰ Specifically, Rupert attacked their distinction between God's "approving" will and His "permitting" will, claiming that it violated the truth of Scripture and accuses God of "permitting" and thus "willing" evil for the sake of a greater good.⁴¹ Hence Rupert remains unconvinced that saying God "permits" evil in His plan for the sake of a greater good is different than saying God "approves" evil in His plan, because in both cases he believes God wills an evil.⁴²

Rupert argued that whenever Scripture teaches on the "permission of God" it refers to God's patience to allow the sinner to repent.⁴³ He would go on to address further questions in this dispute, one pertaining to why God, if He did not will evil, did not create man unchangeable or incontrovertible so that man could not fall into sin. Also included is the question which Rupert saw as the heart of the dispute, if God foreknew Adam and Eve's descent into sin why did he warn them against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the first place. His answers to these questions are

³⁹ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 196.

⁴⁰ Rupert of Deutz, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus* I: 437

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 440.

complicated but are summed up by Van Engen in the following statement: “God accomplished what He willed for man, but He had to do it Himself through Christ's Incarnation and passion, since only a God-man could do perfectly what God had willed.”⁴⁴

The second problem Rupert saw in previous explanations on the necessity of the Incarnation and passion of Christ was “if God did not will evil, then the Incarnation represented something of a 'plan B' (*nouum concilium*), which seemingly contradicts the nature of an omnipotent and immutable God.”⁴⁵ To counter this, Rupert taught that God had planned the Incarnation not because of the Fall but despite the Fall. It is in dealing with this problem that Rupert poses the question in the form of a hypothetical, a perspective which some believe began with him.⁴⁶ Van Engen observes, “Rupert held in response that God intended all along to have the second person of the Trinity assume a concrete, earthly role in the divine plan for His chosen people. Indeed, Christ was meant from all eternity to reign as the King of creation and of his elect, a view expounded by way of Ephesians 3:8-11 and Hebrews 2: 9-10 (used earlier for his Christology).”⁴⁷ That many scholars claimed the central points of the epic story of salvation were the result of contingencies in the choice of Adam and Eve was an offense against God's immutable plan. It is here that Rupert removes Christ's Incarnation from the context of man's sin,

⁴⁴ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 199, 353-354; Rupert of Deutz, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, I: 447-448.

⁴⁵ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 355.

⁴⁶ Rupert of Deutz, *Corpus Christianourm Continuatio Mediaevalis XXIX*, 415. “Hic primum illud quaerere libet utrum iste Filius Dei, de quo hic sermo est, etiam si peccatum, propter quod omnes morimur, non intercessisset, homo fieret, an non.”

⁴⁷ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 256.

allowing him to overcome the difficulties he had found in previous works concerning the necessity of the Incarnation.⁴⁸

Rupert's main argument, that God had foreordained the Incarnation, was based on Proverbs 8:23ff which spoke of the wisdom of God. Rupert understood the Wisdom of God spoken of in the passage as a reference to Christ. For this reason he believed the passage foretold of God's dwelling amongst His people as their Incarnate King. Whatever was to be considered “new” in God's plan was to be attributed to sinful humanity and the Devil. Thus only after original sin was the sacrificial death of the Incarnate God required; but the Incarnation of the Son was always a part of God's plan, despite original sin.⁴⁹ Humanity's fall into sin only served to increase the glory and honor of the Incarnate Son, but it was not willed by God in order to make necessary the Incarnation as many of Rupert's contemporaries believed. Such a distinction can be found in *De gloria et honore Filii hominis super Mattheum 13* which he puts as if Christ were saying it: “I would not have been crowned with such glory and honor as I now have were it not for my sacrificial intercession.”⁵⁰ In this Rupert managed to combine two things which he found essential to his devotion and theology: Christ's Incarnation as the absolute focal point in God's plan and Christ's passion and death as the source now of his glory and honor.⁵¹

Rupert's opinion struck a sensitive cord in theology at that time. It contradicted what was then the prevailing Gregorian view that man was created specifically to replace

⁴⁸ Ibid., 359.

⁴⁹ Rupert of Deutz, *Corpus Christianourm Continuatio Mediaevalis XXIX*, 408-416; cf. Van Engen, Rupert of Deutz, 356.

⁵⁰ Rupert of Deutz, *Corpus Christianourm Continuatio Mediaevalis XXIX*, 417; translation from Van Engen, Rupert of Deutz, 357.

⁵¹ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 353.

the fallen angels in heaven. St. Anselm, Hugh of St. Victor, and Peter Lombard all held to this view which resonated with spirituality at that time and served as the source for seeing the monastic life as a prefiguration of man's ultimate 'angelic' state.⁵² According to Van Engen, Rupert is the first to challenge this view, for he contended that the Angels did not fall from their burning love of God, but that “after their testing . . . the angels were fixed as a reward and by grace in the nine orders mentioned in Scripture.” Men also were created in a comparable nine orders and were equal to the Angels (and could even be said to have owed more to God since they are given a chance for repentance).⁵³ For Rupert it was childish to believe that God did not plan to create the human race until after the fall of the angels, and it made much more sense that God had “created the angels because of the One Man for whom and through whom all things were created, and that men too were created as a part of the predestined plan which had the Incarnate King as its center,” as Van Engen relates.⁵⁴

Rupert's path was indeed much different than Anselm, but a lot of this has to do with the way each of them approached the question. Anselm wrote his *Cur Deus Homo* as an attempt to give a *rational* explanation to non-believers of the necessity of Christ's atoning sacrifice; the Incarnation was seen as part of this overall plan of atonement. It is important to note that Anselm accepted all that was taught by faith to be true, and expressed a deep and holy love for these truths. However, he believed it necessary to

⁵² Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 267-276 (Book I, Chapters 16-18); cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis* I. 5. 31-34; Peter Lombard, *Sentences* 2.9.6-7; Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 358.

⁵³ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 356, 359; cf. Rupert of Deutz, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, III: 69.

⁵⁴ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 359; cf. Rupert of Deutz, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, III: 72-73; R. Haacke, “Rupert von Deutz zur Frage: Cur Deus Homo?” *Corona Gratiarum: Festschrift E. Dekkers* Band 2 (Brugge, 1975): 143-159.

provide a rational foundation for the sake of unbelievers by utilizing dialectical and philosophical concepts. This is precisely why he sought a rational explanation in *Cur Deus Homo*, and his arguments reflect a skilled use of philosophical notions.⁵⁵

On the other hand, Rupert approached the question exclusively through Scripture and not through the scholastic methodology. This can be clearly seen in the controversial debate Rupert found himself in with the disciples of Master Anselm of Laon and Bishop William of Champeaux in Liege. Van Engen speaks of how Rupert was often accused and reproached in this debate for his “irremediable ignorance because, as a monk since childhood, he had never traveled to study with their distant and famous masters. . . These teachers and students of dialectic, on the other hand, touted the power of the logical arts to resolve all theological problems, and disdained this monk for not being properly schooled in them.”⁵⁶ Rupert had been placed by his parents at an early age in the Abbey of St. Lawrence just outside of Liege where he stayed for roughly forty of his fifty-five years. Thus, while these other disciples and masters had traveled far and wide to learn the arts of philosophy and only to later come to Holy Scripture, Rupert had discovered the Holy Scriptures early. For this reason, Rupert saw himself as the defender of Holy Scripture against dialectics not received from tradition.⁵⁷

Rupert's foundation may be the key to understanding his insistence on his explanation of the necessity of Christ's Incarnation and passion. He was formed by the concepts and images of his society as found in the monastic life and, more importantly,

⁵⁵ Anselm of Canterbury, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, 245-248.

⁵⁶ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 202.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11, 202.

the divine office. The celebration of the central events of salvation became the apex of his life through the celebration of the Church's rites. As Van Engen explains, "Such worship had so shaped his life and thought as to make it practically inconceivable that the events celebrated were not themselves predetermined from all eternity for both Christ and mankind. Only the blindness of Jews and the foolishness of new theologians could fail to grasp such a glorious vision of God's plan."⁵⁸ Though Rupert found himself at odds with certain theological movements, which later became significant in the Latin West, he was clearly in conversation with the received tradition of the Church. Even if he gets little credit for his part in the developmental history of the primacy of Christ, it is remarkable how closely his answers resemble that of John Duns Scotus and other members of the Franciscan school. For example, his method, which leads many to categorize him as a mystical thinker, has a strong resemblance to the method of St. Bonaventure.⁵⁹ Rupert becomes the first example of a position opposing St. Anselm and the one to whom many attribute the hypothetical statement attached to the primacy of Christ.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid., 360.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 8; cf. M. Grabmann, *DIE Geschichte der scholastischen Methode* (1909-11) 2. (8-104) and L. Ott, *Untersuchungen zur theologischen Briefliteratur der Fruscholastik* (BGPT 34, Munster 1037), 73-80.

⁶⁰ Horan, "How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?," 375.

Chapter 2: Development of the Christocentric position

Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1175-1253)

The debate over the primacy of Christ began in Anselm and Rupert as a discussion concerning the necessity of Christ's Incarnation and passion. The issue continued to be developed for the most part through the work of theologians within the Franciscan Order who tended to affirm the position of Rupert, though not universally. The non-universality of the thesis within the Order notwithstanding, Rupert's position nevertheless became known as the Franciscan thesis.⁶¹ One of the first who influenced the Order, to begin dealing with the issue was Robert Grosseteste. Grosseteste was the chancellor of the University of Oxford, bishop of Lincoln, and the first instructor of the friars in England. Like Rupert he looked at the issue as a question concerning the necessity of the Incarnation, and as a counter-factual claim which he believed could help us understand certain aspects of the present economy of salvation. Though Grosseteste is not given enough credit for the part he plays, there are indications that he had an influence on other Franciscan thinkers, including the two main luminaries, Bonaventure and Scotus.⁶²

Grosseteste employed a very similar method as Rupert, though there is little

⁶¹ Ibid., 378.

⁶² Ibid., 375.

evidence he knew much of what Rupert had to say on the question. For in the areas of his theological teaching, Grosseteste, as a “*magister in sacra pagina*”, was known for his adherence to the Scriptures. It makes sense, observes Daniel Horan, that the Scriptures would be a “starting point for Grosseteste's exploration of the necessity of the Incarnation.”⁶³ However, it should also be noted that, according to James Ginther, Grosseteste believed it was the “responsibility of the speculative theologian to provide a rational account of what was gained from the study of Scripture.”⁶⁴ This is what led Grosseteste to operate not just as a scriptural exegete but also as a speculative theologian in his study of the question concerning the necessity of the Incarnation.⁶⁵ Due to his turn to more speculative or philosophical explanations, Grosseteste becomes very hesitant to push forward his opinion as the authentic teaching of the Church. Only those aspects which he definitively takes from the Scriptures does he present with any authority. Nevertheless, he is the first to use speculative/theological explanations in favor of the Franciscan school of thought, and can be seen as a bridge between Rupert and later defenders of the position.

Grosseteste takes up the question of the necessity of Christ's Incarnation mainly in *De Cessatione Legalium, Exiit Edictum* (a Christmas homily), and *Hexaemeron*. His arguments from Scripture deal specifically with Old Testament themes in which he attempts to present Christ, the God-man, as the only possible fulfillment of Old

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ James Ginther, “Robert Grosseteste and the Theologian's task,” in *Robert Grosseteste and the Beginnings of a British Theological Tradition*, ed. M. O'Carroll (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 2003), 252.

⁶⁵ Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?,” 382-383, 386; James Ginther, *Master of the sacred page: A study of the theology of Robert Grosseteste, ca. 1229/30-1235* (Aldershot, Haats, England: Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 123-124.

Testament prophecies and blessings.⁶⁶ While it may seem from this that his motivation was to counter Jewish attacks against the faith, James Ginther believes there is very little evidence to support this statement. Rather, he suggests Grosseteste's motivation was simply to understand the place of the Old law within the context of Christ and the New law.⁶⁷

Greater importance is attributed to Grosseteste's arguments of a more speculative nature, for it is here that he employs the hypothetical statement in question. Though Grosseteste acknowledges that Fathers such as St. Gregory, St. Augustine, and St. Anselm all declared that the human race could only be saved through the God-man, he does not believe it had occurred to these men to ask whether or not the Incarnation would have taken place had the human race not sinned (though there is evidence to suggest otherwise).⁶⁸ While it may seem odd that such medieval thinkers would put so much effort into a counter-factual claim, James Ginther offers an explanation as to why Grosseteste believed it was important to consider. First of all, Grosseteste uses the hypothetical in order to “highlight specific true conditions of the world as it is now.”⁶⁹ Secondly, he is using the hypothetical to prove a greater thesis; to show how sin cannot be the direct cause of the Incarnation, so as to establish “reasons for the Incarnation that not only function in a world as it is now, but also in a world devoid of all sin.

⁶⁶ Robert Grosseteste, *The Fathers of the Church: Robert Grosseteste, On the Cessation of the Laws*, p. 1, c. 2, s. 2, trans. by Stephan m. Hildebrand (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2012), 109-110.

⁶⁷ James Ginther, *Master of the Sacred Page* 122; Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?,” 378.

⁶⁸ James Ginther, *Master of the Sacred Page*, 128.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

Grosseteste's aim is not to separate the Incarnation from Christ's saving work, but rather to elucidate its twofold role.”⁷⁰

In this effort Grosseteste offers five different arguments all supported by a theology rooted in Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neo-platonic tradition.⁷¹ The first is based upon the goodness of God and makes use of St. Anselm's definition of God as a “greater Good than can even be thought.”⁷² The argument also draws upon the Pseudo-Dionysian concept of the good being self-diffusive. God created the world in such a way that it would be capable of receiving God's goodness in the highest possible way. As Grosseteste states, “supreme goodness [God] pours in as great a good as it is capable of. But the universe is capable of this good, namely, that it have a part of itself as the God-man. There is nothing that can exist in the universe if the universe is incapable of containing it; and the universe already has this good. Therefore, it is capable of this good, and was not made capable of this good by the fall of man.”⁷³ The fact that God is the supreme good and the universe is capable of the God-man leads him to say that the God-man would have come despite the fall. Thus the world would have been created in such a way so as to receive the greatest good, which Grosseteste says can only be the Incarnate God.⁷⁴

The second argument is based upon the idea that the hypostatic union of the Word of God was achieved primarily through the “*intellectum*” or “intellect,” a position he

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 130; cf. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 82-104.

⁷³ Robert Grosseteste, *The Fathers of the Church*, 156.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Cf. Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?,” fn. 64, 389.

takes from Peter Lombard and John Damascene. From this, Grosseteste will say that the human flesh was equally assumable, if not more, considering the weakening of the intellect due to sin, prior to the fall as it was after man had sinned. “Either the assumption of the flesh by the Word through the mediation of the soul [intellect] was more possible when man was in Paradise [prior to the fall] than it would be now [after the fall], or at least it was as possible as it would be now.”⁷⁵ At this point Grosseteste returns to his first argument by stating it makes sense to say that God would have become incarnate, considering it would have been just as possible if not more, even if we had not sinned because the whole of creation is better “than it could in any way be without this good [the God-man]. . . Either, then one must say that God would have become man even if man had not fallen, or that the whole of creation is now inestimably better than it would have been if man had not fallen.”⁷⁶ The third argument is based upon a distinction which Grosseteste makes in his understanding of justice and sanctification. Put simply, he argues that the human race, even apart from the fall, is in need of the Incarnation for the sake of sanctification (though not justice). For only in the God-man can the human race be sanctified and lifted up as children of the most high God. In this, Grosseteste does not believe being sanctified is the same as being justified.⁷⁷

The fourth argument arises from Grosseteste's reading of Ephesians 1:22 and 5:23. According to these passages Christ is meant to be head of the Church apart from any act of sin on humanity's part. That such a holy institution as the Church should be dependent

⁷⁵ Robert Grosseteste, *The Fathers of the Church*, 157; cf. James Ginther, *Master of the Sacred Page*, 130.

⁷⁶ Robert Grosseteste, *The Fathers of the Church*, 158.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 159-161; James Ginther, *Master of the Sacred Page*, 136.

on the sin of the human race makes no sense to Grosseteste for this very reason. Thus, he concludes that the Incarnation was always intended because Christ was predestined to a nuptial relationship with the Church. “Before he fell, Adam prophesied the marriage of Christ and the Church. . .”⁷⁸ In many ways, the fifth and final explanation brings us to the heart of Grosseteste's theology and what is characteristic of the Franciscan mindset. The argument is based upon the understanding of the universe as a unified creation, with Christ (the Incarnate God) as the unifying principle. Such a principle could not be accomplished in man alone (apart from his union with the Word of God). The unifying principle, according to Grosseteste, must be more worthy than all other creatures, and thus it can only be the God-man.⁷⁹ As Horan describes it, “The Incarnation was necessary to unify all parts of creation and to complete the capacity for fulfillment God intended for the universe.”⁸⁰

Despite his hesitancy to enter into the area of speculative thought, Grosseteste's use of Pseudo-Dionysius to support a christocentric view of creation breaks new ground in the development of the Church's understanding of the primacy of Christ. Ginther argues, “The question [the hypothetical] had been posed before, but Grosseteste is the first to address the problem with such intensity that it created a new topic for scholastic theologians to examine for the rest of the century.”⁸¹ Because his arguments in favor of Rupert's thesis were speculative and theological, Grosseteste influenced a list of other

⁷⁸ Robert Grosseteste, *The Fathers of the Church*, 163; cf. Robert Grosseteste, *On the Six Days of Creation*, p. I, c. 9, s. 1, trans. by C.F.J. Martin (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996), 60-61; Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?,” 381-382.

⁷⁹ Robert Grosseteste, *The Fathers of the Church*, 176-169.

⁸⁰ Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?,” 382.

⁸¹ Ginther, *Master of the Sacred Page*, 128.

theologians including Alexander of Hales, St. Bonaventure, and Bl. John Duns Scotus, all of whom express very similar christocentric theological systems.⁸² These men, specifically the latter two, will become the great thinkers of the Middle Ages who will provide the most profound developments in our understanding of Christ's primacy.

Alexander of Hales (ca. 1170-1245)

Alexander of Hales favored the position which held that the Incarnation was willed by God independent of the fall, and is thus in the school of Rupert and Grosseteste. His main argument for this position, found in his *Summa Theologica*, is very reminiscent of Grosseteste's first argument which utilizes the Pseudo-Dionysian principle of the Good being diffusive of Itself. Like Grosseteste, Alexander is firmly within the Pseudo-Dionysian/Neo-platonic school of thought, and bases his arguments upon such principles. Since God is what he calls the summum Bonum, the highest Good, it is most fitting that such Goodness be diffused in the highest way.⁸³ This takes place primarily *ad intra*, within the inner life of the Trinity. Yet God is also capable of doing this *ad extra* through His creation, and Alexander believes God's nature, and the nature of the created order, demands that God diffuse His Goodness *ad extra* in the highest possible way.⁸⁴ In order to achieve the highest diffusion *ad extra*, God Himself must become a part of creation and take upon Himself our human nature.⁸⁵ All of this is summed up in the following

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Alexander of Hales, *Doctoris Irrefragabilis Alexandri De Hales Ordinis Minorum Summa Theologica*, Vol. 4, lib. III, tr. 1, q. 2, tit. 2 (Florentiae: Ad Claras Aquas, 1930), 41.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

statement from Alexander's *Summa*:

If therefore the highest diffusion ought to belong to Him, since He is the highest Good, it is more appropriate that He should diffuse Himself into creatures. But this diffusion cannot be understood to be the highest unless He Himself be united to the creature. Therefore, it is fitting that God should be united to a creature, and especially to man, as has been shown. Therefore, supposing that man were not fallen, the highest Good would still be united to him.⁸⁶

Pancheri observes that such arguments are clearly *a priori*, based upon the nature of God and creation. For this reason, there is a sense that God had to create *ad extra* and that God's nature demands that the Incarnation be part of His creation. While Alexander's primary argument is expressive of early Franciscan thought on the subject, it will ultimately be rejected by both Bonaventure and Scotus; it will become one of main reasons for Bonaventure's affirmation of Anselm's hamartiocentric position.

St. Bonaventure (ca. 1221-1274)

Of all the medieval scholars other than Scotus, St. Bonaventure is the most renowned for his contribution to the development of the primacy of Christ. Though he will be the exception of the Franciscan theologians and affirm the position of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, his christological work pushed forward the Church's understanding of the primacy of Christ in many significant ways. A student of Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure can be placed theologically within the school of Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neo-Platonic tradition; his overall work strongly resembles the christocentrism of Grosseteste. Much of this goes back to Bonaventure's belief that St. Francis of Assisi was the model theologian, a truth he sees confirmed by the stigmata Francis received on

⁸⁶Ibid., trans. from Pancheri, *The Univeral Primacy of Christ*, 122.

Mount La Verna. This event, for Bonaventure, marked the holiness of Francis' life due to his imitation of Christ the God-man.⁸⁷ Bonaventure viewed this “imitation” as the most essential aspect of any theological pursuit.⁸⁸

Bonaventure has often been described as a mystical theologian because his thought is characterized by the lack of distinction he places between the sciences of theology and philosophy. This approach has led many to view him as anti-philosophical and anti-Aristotelian; but this critique is unfounded since he very competently operates at the philosophical level.⁸⁹ As Zachary Hayes claims, “It would not be fair to describe Bonaventure as either anti-Aristotelian or as anti-philosophical. He clearly knew and respected the great lights of antiquity, including Plato and Aristotle.”⁹⁰ It is also important to avoid neglecting the central role such a methodology plays in his overall theological vision. As Joseph Ratzinger discusses in *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, the lack of distinction that Bonaventure places between philosophy and theology goes back to his understanding of Christ as the center of history. “For Bonaventure, history consists of two corresponding movements from the very beginning- *egressus* and *regressus*. Christ stands as the turning point of these movements and as the center who both divides and unites.”⁹¹ For this reason, Ratzinger argues that Bonaventure is not so much anti-

⁸⁷ Zachary Hayes, *The History of Franciscan Theology*, “Bonaventure: Mystery of the Triune God,” ed. Kenan B. Osborne (St. Bonaventure, NY: St. Bonaventure University, 2007), 45.

⁸⁸ St. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, “Prologue”, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1978), 55-53-116; cf. Ilia Delio, “Theology, Spirituality and Christ the Center: Bonaventure’s Synthesis” in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, ed. Jay Hammond, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and Jarred Goff (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014).

⁸⁹ Hayes, “Bonaventure: Mystery of the Triune God,” 47-48; cf. Ratzinger, *The Theology of History In St. Bonaventure*, 119.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History In St. Bonaventure*, 142.

philosophical or anti-Aristotelian as he simply does not believe these sciences can stand on their own apart from what has been revealed through Christian revelation. All of this strongly resembles Grosseteste's final argument in favor of Christ's primacy that the Incarnate God serves as the unifying principle for God's whole act of creation.⁹²

The christocentrism of St. Bonaventure goes much deeper than placing Christ at the center of the history of creation. Bonaventure, not unlike other contemporary Franciscans, built his whole theological system upon an anthropology taken from the Book of Genesis. It is here that Revelation tells us God created the human race in “His own image and likeness” (Genesis 1:26-27). Such a truth has profound implications for anthropology because it means God created us in a way that is expressive of the Holy Trinity. Furthermore, Bonaventure believes this is true not just of the human race but of the whole created cosmos, which is ordered so that humanity is placed at the center of the cosmic hierarchy.⁹³ For the human person is a hylomorphic being, embracing both the spiritual (transcendent) and material aspects of God's cosmic creation on account of the unifying of these two principles in their essence. Humanity is “the peak,” according to Bonaventure, because it alone of material creation can give a response to love.⁹⁴ Such a biblical anthropology expresses our capacity to participate in the divine being, a truth essential to Bonaventure's theology of the Incarnation since it leads to the perception that God created the material cosmos in a way that was open to the God-man. The Incarnation

⁹² Ibid., 133-134, 119-159.

⁹³ Bonaventure, *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae: Opera Theologica Selecta, I Sentences*, d. 43, a. u., q. 3, resp., (I, 772) (Floritiae: Ad Claras Aquas, 1938), 612; cf. Hayes, *The History of Franciscan Theology*, 67.

⁹⁴ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, p. 2, c. 4., trans. by Erwin Esser Nemmers, A.M. Mus.M , LL. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Brook Company, 1947), 55-57.

becomes the completion and fulfillment of the created universe.

Despite the christocentrism of his theological vision, Bonaventure does not share the opinion of Grosseteste on the primacy of Christ. Rather, he affirms the opinion in line with St. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. He takes up the question in his *Commentary on the Sentences* where he mentions two opinions common at that time, both of which he considered probable. The first opinion follows the christocentric line of thought of Grosseteste, and makes a distinction between the Incarnation's substance and its passable modality as seen through its execution. In speaking of the substance of the Incarnation, Bonaventure is referring to it as it exists in the mind of God regardless of the moral condition of man. To speak of its passable modality, he is referring to how the Incarnation is seen through God's execution of the Incarnation in history. This aspect is affected by man's sinful condition.

According to Bonaventure, the claim of this christocentric opinion is that the “ratio praecipua” for the substance of the Incarnation is the perfection of God's work (creation).⁹⁵ Pancheri argues that this language is essential in understanding Bonaventure's argumentation, because it establishes a fundamental distinction in his thought. “Ratio” here means reason and “praecipua” means particular, especial, or specific. Thus Bonaventure speaks of a particular or especial reason for the Incarnation rather than a motivation or cause so as to imply that we are searching for reasons that lie within the mind of God Himself. Since God's actions in the world, *ad extra*, are not determined by anything outside of Himself, we cannot speak of a motivation but a “ratio praecipua.” As Pancheri describes this point, “St. Bonaventure does not inquire into the

⁹⁵ Bonaventure, *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae: III Sentences*, d. 1, a. 2, q. 2, 19.

motive of the Incarnation, but rather into its *ratio*. The former term designates something which moves someone from the outside, and God cannot be “moved” by anything or anyone but Himself. On the contrary, 'ratio' specifies the interior meaning, the intrinsic principle of intelligibility, i.e., that which primarily determines all other components.”⁹⁶

The substance of the Incarnation brings the cosmos to its perfection, and this perfection is not dependent upon humanities descent into sin.⁹⁷ What is affected by sin is the way in which God executes His plan in salvation history. Since man did fall into sin, the Incarnate God now takes upon himself a passable human nature, one capable of suffering, so as to be able to endure the passion and death on the Cross to redeem man. Thus according to Bonaventure, the claim of the christocentric position is that the substance of the Incarnation, and thus its position in salvation history, remains unaffected by original sin. Sin affects only the way in which the Incarnation is carried out.⁹⁸ The second opinion follows St. Anselm's hamartiocentric understanding of the Incarnation, and does not make a distinction between its substance and modality. The “ratio praecipua” in both its substance and modality is the redemption and restoration of the human race. Thus it is willed by God 'after' the fall of man.⁹⁹

The clarity of his distinction between the substance and modality (or execution) of the Incarnation in his explanation for the christocentric position is one of the significant contributions Bonaventure makes to the development of this question. For it shows how it is logically possible for the proponents of this position to believe that original sin affects

⁹⁶ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 20.

⁹⁷ Bonaventure, *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae: III Sentences*, d. 1, a. 2, q. 2, resp., 19-20.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

the Incarnation; and at that same time not be occasioned by it. This resembles the opinion of Rupert, who believed the sin of Adam was foreknown and permitted and only served to bring Christ more glory and honor; whereas the Incarnation was foreknown and foreordained.¹⁰⁰

Before stating specifically which position he holds, Bonaventure explains: “Which of these two opinions is more true is known to Him Who designed to become Incarnate for us. But it is difficult to see which of these should be preferred, since both are in accordance with Catholic belief, and both are held by Catholics.”¹⁰¹ Though both are regarded as being in conformity with Catholic belief, Bonaventure is not ignorant of the tension that exists between the two positions. The first regards the Incarnation as central or foundational in God's creative act, making the universe christocentric in nature. The God-man is much more than just the remedy for sin, but the reason and purpose behind all that is created. Bonaventure is attached to this christocentric viewpoint as his whole theological and philosophical system has its basis in the Book of Genesis, as was previously shown. The second opinion regards the Incarnation as hamartiocentric, or willed for the sake of redemption, which Bonaventure will also accept. However, to say that the Incarnation is hamartiocentric implies that God's creation is not christocentric, because the Incarnation was occasioned by sin under this view and thus not the center of God's creative act.

The deciding factor for Bonaventure is the position which he regards as more conducive to faith and piety. Though he does admit that “both opinions also, according to

¹⁰⁰ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 356.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

different considerations, are conducive to devotion,” he accepts the second opinion as more conducive for a couple of reasons.¹⁰² According to Bonaventure, what is more in conformity with piety and faith must be grounded in the Scriptures and the Fathers, and should avoid those arguments that begin from *a priori* grounds. It must be grounded in the Scriptures and the Fathers because Bonaventure considers God's revelation as the basis for any knowledge concerning God, and this is given through God's acts in salvation history. Bonaventure also insists that God does everything outside of Himself (*ad extra*) in perfect freedom. God acts *ad extra* solely because He wills to do so, not because He has to by any demand of His nature. This is why Bonaventure rejects argumentation that begins from *a priori* grounds, such as the argument of Alexander of Hales and Grosseteste, which was based on Pseudo-Dionysius' concept of the self-diffusiveness of the supreme goodness of God.

From the Scriptures he specifically cites Matthew 18 and Galatians 4:45, two passages which make direct reference to the redemptive purposes of the Incarnation. From the Fathers, Pancheri believes it is specifically St. Augustine and St. Bernard whom Bonaventure has in mind. Both of these scholars speak in favor of the hamartiocentric position, but believe that the christocentric position is also most fitting.¹⁰³ Bonaventure simply went with the opinion he perceived to be more explicitly expressed by Scripture and most strongly supported by the Church. This makes sense considering Bonaventure's methodology that starts with revelation and moves into speculative theology. Faith is an essential starting point for Bonaventure, and something which set for him the limitations

¹⁰² Ibid.; c.f. Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, fn 30, 123.

¹⁰³ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, fn 30, 123.

to any theological investigation. Thus there is some logic for why Bonaventure would choose the opinion he perceived to be *ex pietate*. As Pancheri explains, “this is a necessary sequel of the very concept of theology as understood by the Doctor. The 'pietas' toward God has here a fundamental function to fulfill; it is faith lived.”¹⁰⁴ This is the logical conclusion of a theology which believes the world was created so as to reveal the Godhead.

Bonaventure's emphasis on the will of God in the creation of the world shapes his perspective and moves him to utilize *a posteriori* arguments. God's will is His mode of operation in the universe since we cannot say God does anything *ad extra* necessarily. Nor is there anything in creation that can determine the way in which God must act, but every action is done in complete and perfect freedom.¹⁰⁵ This critique of *a priori* arguments constitutes Bonaventure's most significant contribution to the development of Catholic thought on the primacy of Christ, because it is the reason why he shifts the question away from the counter-factual claim. For Bonaventure, the issue centers on the will and intention of God for the Incarnation *in the present economy of salvation*. So, even if hypothetical questions occur, something much more foundational is at stake in his mind than simply dealing with a question about an alternate economy of salvation.¹⁰⁶ After Bonaventure, the hypothetical must be regarded as a superficial perspective on the question of Christ's primacy because Bonaventure specifies exactly how the question concerns the present salvific order in the distinction between christocentric and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁵ Bonaventure, *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae: II Sentences*, d. 1, p. II, a 2, q. 1, 35-36.

¹⁰⁶ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 20.

hamartiocentric viewpoints.

Bonaventure affirms the Anselmian hamartiocentric viewpoint of the Incarnation because an alternate economy of salvation doesn't promote devotion and piety in the faithful. However, he also remains attached to the christocentrism of his theological system. He even acknowledges that the christocentric viewpoint is more “subtle” and “logical” in its distinction between substance and modality.¹⁰⁷ This puts Bonaventure in a difficult position, as he must now explain how it is possible to maintain both the christocentrism of creation and the hamartiocentrism of the Incarnation. To answer this tension, he will ultimately make a distinction between two different world orders. The first, prior to the fall, had the Word of God directly as its head. The second was established after the fall, and had the Incarnate Word of God as its head.

Bonaventure will explain this distinction between the two orders of salvation, which he believes solves the apparent contradiction between his christocentric worldview and his hamartiocentric understanding of the Incarnation, in his response to several objections.¹⁰⁸ The objections of specific concern extend from the christocentric nature of Franciscan thought. Thus they are founded upon a different line of argumentation than the aprioristic arguments, and rely heavily on a point which Bonaventure willingly accepts and ardently defends.¹⁰⁹ He will even place humanity at the center of creation's *hierarchical* structure (between pure spiritual beings as the angels and pure material beings such as the animals and plants) precisely because it is through the human race that

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁸ Bonaventure, *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae: III Sentences*, d. 1, a. 2, q. 2, resp., 19-20.

¹⁰⁹ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 22-23.

all of creation remains open to receiving the God-man. As the Word of God made flesh, the Incarnation provides God with the greatest glory and the greatest revelation of Himself *ad extra*, making it the most fitting way for God to reveal Himself.¹¹⁰ As was already seen, such a theology seemingly contradicts the hamartiocentric understanding of the Incarnation which Bonaventure has also chosen to affirm.

However, he believes that he has provided a suitable explanation for these objections by citing the possibility that there may have been two separate orders of salvation which God had in mind; and the present order of salvation was determined by the fall of man. This explanation is taken specifically when he deals with objections that pertain to Christ as head of the Church. Such objections state that if Christ is head of the universal Church, then the Church must also be occasioned by sin since it could not have Christ as her head apart from sin. To answer this, Bonaventure suggests that two orders of salvation exists, as explained earlier. But such an explanation is completely unsatisfactory for many proponents of the first opinion. A radical change in the head implies a substantial change in the creature, and it eliminates any possibility that the unfallen angels could be members of the Church since they would have remained under the first order of salvation.¹¹¹

Such argumentation extends into another objection concerning matrimony as a sign of Christ's union with the Church and at the same time instituted prior to the fall. If there are two orders of salvation as Bonaventure proposes, it is not possible to have such an obvious sign of the Incarnate God contained within the first order of creation. This

¹¹⁰Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, p. 2, c. 4, 55-56.

¹¹¹ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 22-23.

suggests God created the universe with one order of salvation in mind; and it is clear that Christ the God-man was the head of this creation. Not only does Bonaventure's christocentric theological system suggest this, but the Scriptures strongly favor it as well. Furthermore, if the "ratio praecipua" of the Incarnation is redemption as the hamartiocentric opinion proposes, then the Incarnation must be considered an occasioned work of God. This is absurd to proponents of the christocentric position since it is not logical to say that a greater good is occasioned by a lesser good. More importantly, it would violate the whole understanding of Christ's central place in God's creative act. Christ could not be the center and unifying principle to the whole universe if he is occasioned by something that happened within the universe.

However, Bonaventure disagrees that Christ is predestined *occasionaliter* within the hamartiocentric opinion since he was willed freely after the prevision of sin. Put differently, God freely willed Christ after He foresaw humanity's descent into sin. Though God's original plan may not have included sin (thus having the Word directly as its Head), God's foreknowledge of sin allows Him to make previsions in his original act of creation. This seemingly allows for both a christocentric understanding of the universe, and a hamartiocentric understanding of the Incarnation. The issue is essentially shifted from the order of execution to the order of intention in the mind of God. Yet, as Pancheri argues, this simply does not answer the problem. What is being determined is whether in the present economy of salvation, Christ's predestination is dependent upon sin in the order of God's intention, and thus occasioned by it. If God foresees man's sin and then wills the Incarnation as a remedy for it as St. Bonaventure claims, then the Incarnation is still willed, figuratively speaking, "after" sin within God's intention; and thus occasioned

by it.¹¹² To claim that God's foreknowledge of sin allows him to create with Christ as the head without losing the hamartiocentric nature of the Incarnation does not take into account Bonaventure's most profound contribution in moving the question beyond the hypothetical. This is precisely why proponents of the christocentric opinion can rightfully find these responses unsatisfactory.

St. Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274)

The work of St. Thomas Aquinas only serves to affirm these conclusions. Thomas himself treated the problem, “not so much under the aspect of Christ's primacy as that of the Incarnation's relationship to the redemption along the well-known Anselmian lines.”¹¹³ Given that St. Thomas operated under Anselmian lines, it is very clear that he is going to favor the hamartiocentric position which would later follow in his name sake as the Thomistic thesis. Unlike St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas' perspective on the question took the form of the well-known hypothetical. According to Pancheri, this “reveals a complete dependence on St. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*.”¹¹⁴ To be fair to Aquinas, it is clear that he did not mean to examine the issue as a pure hypothetical, but to elucidate a factual reality. It is also very likely that Aquinas adopted this perspective as a way of summing up the work of some of the Fathers, like Augustine whom Thomas quotes as saying, “if man had not fallen, the Son of Man would not have come.” Nevertheless, “it was precisely the owing to the authority of St. Thomas that the hypothetical formulation

¹¹² Ibid., 23.

¹¹³ Ibid., 25.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

of the question prevailed everywhere.”¹¹⁵

Pancheri further argues that Aquinas borrowed the motivations for this solution from St. Bonaventure, but affirms this position more cautiously and with greater hesitation than his Franciscan counterpart. As he explains in the *Summa Theologica*, he believes that those issues which are beyond the ability of reason should be left to revelation. Since the Scriptures always speak of the Incarnation in terms of the redemption of man, it is fitting to say that the Incarnation was ordained as a remedy for sin and thus would not have happened had man not fallen. St. Thomas says this concerning the present order of salvation and concedes that it is not unfitting to say the Word could have become Incarnate even without the fall.¹¹⁶

Pancheri will also make the claim that certain aspects of Thomas' theology should have led him to affirm the first position over the second, just as we saw in Bonaventure. Specifically, Thomas believed that the grace given to the angels and innocent Adam depended essentially, not just accidentally upon Christ since both angels and men belong to the Mystical Body of Christ. This should have naturally led him to the conclusion that Christ was predestined prior to the fall of Adam, which would make the hamartiocentric position untenable. But Thomas also thinks God could change the end or final cause of a creature without changing their nature. Scotus will later deny this, allowing him to use the argument from Christ's predestination in favor of the christocentric position.¹¹⁷

In regards to the christocentric opinion, Thomas states in his *Commentary on the*

¹¹⁵ Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine: Sermons*, “Sermon 174, 2,” 258. “Si homo non perisset, Filius hominis non venisset.”

¹¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 1, a. 3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1948), 4:2022.

¹¹⁷ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 28.

Sentences: “Others indeed say that since through the Incarnation of the Son of God is accomplished not only the liberation from sin, but also the exaltation of human nature and perfection of the whole universe, the Incarnation would have come about because of these reasons even if there were no sin; and this can be sustained as probable.”¹¹⁸ St. Augustine held to a very similar position, though he also can be said to have operated on what would later become known as the hamartiocentric understanding to the Incarnation. What God willed apart from sin is not an area he wished to go into in any depth, and thus he did not give the question much weight for further discussion in Christology.¹¹⁹ Much of this had to do with his hypothetical perspective of the question, and this is part of the reason Bonaventure is able to make more significant contributions to the questions development.

In fact, what Thomas does contribute, though it is likely he does so unconsciously, is an affirmation that the question provides a significant theological foundation in our understanding of this present economy of salvation- a point which makes the hypothetical perspective superficial at best. Bonaventure recognized this, and his unsatisfactory attempts to hold to both a christocentric universe and hamartiocentric Incarnation only served as a further affirmation of this point. As was already seen, Thomas did not view it as an important question because it is hypothetical. Despite this fact, Pancheri has suggested that Thomas structured his *Summa Theologica* on the Anselmian hamartiocentric principle.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia: Commentary on the Sentences III*, d. 1, a. 3, *Respondo dicendum* (Parisii: Impriarie Pierre Larousse, 1873), 13; translation from Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 124. “Alii vero dicunt, quod cum per incarnationem Filii Dei non solum liberatio a peccato, sed etiam humanae naturae exaltatio, et totius universi consummatio facta sit; etiam peccato non existente, propter has causas incarnatio fuisset: **et hoc etiam probabiliter sustineri potest.**”

¹¹⁹ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 27.

Reflecting upon the work of Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990), Yves Congar (1904-1995), and Etienne Gilson (1884-1978), Pancheri explains that the *Summa* was built upon the Aristotelian concept of science. For Aristotle, philosophy is an understanding of reality through the highest cause of things (*per altissimas causas*) and is seen through the fourfold aspect of causality: efficient, final, material, and formal. Within this Aristotelian framework, St. Thomas introduces the Neo-platonic notion of *exitus* and *reditus* in relation to God. However, Pancheri further explains that “the difficulty with this systematization concerns precisely the peculiar character of salvation history which, being a contingent, gratuitous and free work of God, lacks all necessity. In effect, St. Thomas introduces Christ at the end of his work (*Tertia Pars*), after the entire theology . . . has already been constructed.”¹²⁰ According to this plan, after treating God Himself as the efficient final cause, he moves into creation (natural order), and grace (supernatural order), and finally Christ as the *via* or way for the *reditus in Deum*. Thus the Incarnation emerges as the means to bring about the *reditus* which man had found impossible to achieve due to Adam's sin. Thus, according to Pancheri, “what we have here is actually a succession of three plans: the universal one of creation; the particular one of grace which presupposes the first; and finally, the hypostatic order which presupposes both. . . Christ is projected then as a concrete *modality* of the creature's *reditus in Deum*.”¹²¹

As Pancheri will go on to observe, in basing his plan of the *Summa* on Aristotelian

¹²⁰ Ibid., 29.

¹²¹ Ibid.; c.f. Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., *St. Thomas d'Aquin et la theologie* (np: Paris), Editions du Seuil [1963]; Andre, Hayen O.P., *St Thomas d'Aquin et la vie de L'Eglise*, (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1952); Per Erik Persson, *Le plan de la Somme Theologique et le rapport, "Ratio-Revelatio,"* in *RPL* 56 (1958): 545-572; E. Gilson, in *BT* 8 (1953): 10; Y. Congar, O.P., *La foi et la theologie* (Tournay, 1962): 203-205.

philosophical notions, St. Thomas is presenting a theology of creation which does not resemble the christocentrism of Grosseteste or Bonaventure. In the original plan of God, Christ is not the Head of all creation or the one in whom God has predestined us before the foundations of the world as St. Paul states in Ephesians (Eph 1:4). Christ is the means of our *reditus* to God; but he is not our *exitus a Deo*.¹²² Thus St. Thomas could not accept the christocentric position because, unlike St. Bonaventure, his theological system presented in the *Summa* would not allow it. This is why Thomas' disciples worked so hard to defend his position after Scotus. They understood that the Franciscan thesis contradicted the whole plan of the *Summa*. This point alone affirms St. Bonaventure's recognition that the hypothetical lens obscures what is truly being sought in answering this question. The issue then becomes whether or not limiting our view of the Incarnation to a redemptive lens obscures the truth about creation, and ultimately anthropology. Bonaventure and Thomas did not think so, but John Duns Scotus disagrees.

¹²² Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 30.

Chapter 3: Blessed John Duns Scotus (ca. 1266-1308)

Many scholars believe Catholic thought on the primacy of Christ reaches its pinnacle in the work of Blessed John Duns Scotus. Even those who object to his position find it difficult to ignore the depth of his arguments. This does not mean there is no connection in Scotus' work to earlier theologians, and it is important that we recognize and acknowledge these influences in order to fully grasp the depth of Scotus' thought.¹²³ We can start with his method. Though Scotus utilizes highly philosophical concepts, his method is best understood in the context of his Franciscan background because divine love forms the basis and principle of intelligibility for his whole theological work. This simple fact follows from his belief that the world cannot be understood apart from God's perfectly free, and thus loving, decision to create all things *ad extra*.

From this Scotus will say the created world is a contingent reality, reliant completely on the will of God to create. Such an understanding of creation will lead

¹²³ Horan, "How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?," 383.

Scotus to pursue arguments based on predestination, which he sees as a gratuitous (free) unmerited gift that God bestows upon a creature, in favor of the christocentric position. He will specifically apply an important distinction to his understanding of freedom and the relationship between the will and intellect that will set him apart from previous thinkers. For Scotus does not understand the perfection of the will, as the rational faculty of the soul, to be the mindless and disordered pursuit of what is perceived to be beneficial; but rather the capability to firmly grasp the objective, *ordered* good apart from what is beneficial. This distinction allows Scotus to affirm the christocentric position precisely because he sees the Incarnation as the greatest good, and the creature to which all of creation is ordered.

Love as the starting point

Recognizing that Scotus is grounded in the spirit of the St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Paul VI describes him as having held “virtue of greater value than learning” and to have confirmed the “pre-eminence of love over knowledge.”¹²⁴ In speaking of Scotus' work on the primacy, Beraud De Saint-Maurice suggests that one must first understand the love which Scotus had toward the soul of Christ to understand the secret behind his teachings concerning him. “When I speak praise of Christ, I should prefer to speak in excess rather

¹²⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Alma Parans*, July 14, 1966, in *Franciscan Studies* 27, no. 1 (January 1967), 7. “Beside the principal and magnificent temple, which of St. Thomas Aquinas, there are others, among which, although differing from it in style and size, is that splendid temple which John Duns Scotus, with his ardent and contemplative genius, based on solid foundations and built up with daring pinnacles pointing towards heaven. Following the wake of more than fifty Franciscan Scholastics . . . he assimilated and perfected their teachings and excelled them all, becoming the principal standard-bearer of the Franciscan School. . . St. Francis of Assisi's most beautiful ideal of perfection and the ardour of the Seraphic Spirit are embedded in the work of Scotus and inflame it, for he ever *holds virtue of greater value than learning*. Teaching as he does the *pre-eminence of love over knowledge*, the *universal primacy of Christ*, who is the greatest of God's works. . . he develops to its full height every point of the revealed Gospel truth which Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Paul understood to be preeminent in the divine plan of salvation.”

than be deficient...! This bold exclamation, flooding up from John Duns Scotus' heart aflame with love, betrays the secret of his intuitions regarding Jesus Christ. In this it is understood why our theologian was able to grasp in all its vastness the plan of God in a harmonious and perfect whole, ordered by *love*.”¹²⁵ St. Bonaventure believed that theology was an “affective science,” whereas for other thinkers like St. Thomas it was a “speculative science.”¹²⁶ John Duns Scotus certainly follows in the tradition of his Franciscan predecessor.

There is a profound connection in this to the Franciscan understanding of theology which led St. Bonaventure, Grosseteste (though not a Franciscan himself), Alexander of Hales, and all the Franciscan theologians who preferred the christocentric theological path. This is why it is interesting that Horan will cite Scotus' philosophical method as one major distinction between him and the work of previous christocentric thinkers (especially Grosseteste). “It is through natural reason, not revelation that Scotus believes we are able to delve into the question of the Incarnation and it is with reason that he makes his case.”¹²⁷

It is true that Scotus operates very well philosophically and he does go beyond most of his predecessors, besides St. Bonaventure, in this aspect of his thought. However, to say that Scotus' method relies heavily upon the implications of reason rather than revelation does not seem to paint a fully accurate picture of Scotus' method. As we have

¹²⁵ John Duns Scotus, *Oxon.*, 3, d. 13, q. 4, n. 9 (14, 463) quoted in Beraud De Saint-Maurice, *John Duns Scotus: A Teacher For Our Times*, trans. Columban Duffy, O.F.M. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1955), 239. “In commendando enim Christum, malo excedere quam deficere a laude sibi debita, si propter ignorantiam oporteat in alterutrum incidere.”

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Horan, “How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?”, 385.

just seen in the previous quote from Saint-Maurice, faith and devotion, not reason, provides the motivation for Scotus' thought; and his opinion has its foundation in the Scriptures whereby he is shown to defend a *biblical*, rather than a merely *philosophical*, conception of God and man. As Pancheri observes, in regards to the philosophical nature of Duns Scotus' arguments: "We are *not* dealing with a purely *philosophical conception* elaborated by analyzing human experience, but an eminently theological one inasmuch as Scotus knew how to *emphasize* the *biblical* notion of God and of man in contradistinction to the anaturalistic and physicist concepts peculiar to the Greco-Aristotelians."¹²⁸

Though Scotus did present highly philosophical concepts in his arguments, faith, devotion, and the perspective of love provide the most accurate way of approaching his work. But the significance of Scotus' emphasis on love goes far beyond his method. It provides us the key to understanding his whole argumentation on this issue. The work of Duns Scotus on the primacy of Christ can be described as a synthesis of the two great New Testament evangelists, St. John and St. Paul. The most logical starting point is with the words of St. John, "Deus Caritas est!," "God is love" (1 John 4:16). "This diminutive exposition forms the keystone of the Franciscan Doctor's whole philosophical, theological, ascetic, and mystical system. Duns Scotus does not believe he can escape by means of any science the body of knowledge under which God willed to re-capitulate all knowledge and all love."¹²⁹

Since God is love, love is the only principle by which we can truly understand His work *ad extra*. According to Scotus, love becomes the point of view that allows us to

¹²⁸ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 32.

¹²⁹ Saint-Maurice, *John Duns Scotus: A Teacher For Our Times*, 254.

fully comprehend God's creation. The importance of love in Scotus' thought means that a proper understanding of freedom is essential in order to fully appreciate the depth of his arguments on the primacy of Christ. This, though deeply philosophical in nature, will help us grasp precisely why Scotus so adamantly promoted the Franciscan position on the primacy of Christ.

The doctrine of Christ's primacy represents the very center and essence of the salvation mystery, the very substance of the 'historia salutis,' and therefore the primacy will show forth in a dominant way that freedom is at the root of that history. This explains why one will never grasp the depth, originality and intrinsic motivations of Scotus' solution without an adequate knowledge of his teaching on freedom. It is precisely in freedom and love that the person expresses itself in its highest and strictest value. The 'historia salutis' is simply unintelligible if we do not find in it the concrete actuation of the love-freedom factor.¹³⁰

Freedom: the relationship between the intellect and the will

Any discussion of freedom naturally leads philosophical minds to questions concerning the will. Catholic thinkers during Scotus' time often debated over the relationship that exists between the two main faculties of the human soul, the will and the intellect. These discussions actually bring to light something very significant for our understanding of what Scotus will have to say on the primacy of Christ. It is widely accepted that a person cannot consciously will any action unless they have some knowledge of what they are choosing. Also widely accepted is the understanding that a person has some sort of control over the reasoning process of the intellect. Beyond these, philosophers for the most part disagree on how exactly the will and intellect relate to one another. Some emphasize the intellect over the will, and others the will over the intellect.

In our own day, many Catholics tend to follow the opinion of St. Thomas Aquinas

¹³⁰ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 32.

and say that the will has a natural inclination to self-fulfillment or happiness. In this system of thought, the will has a rather passive role to play in regards to the intellect, since it always chooses that which the intellect presents to it as most conducive to its happiness or fulfillment.¹³¹ The problem is that quite often the intellect is wrong (since it has been darkened by original sin), and inaccurately presents such things to the will. This causes the will to choose wrongly and thus fall into sin. Moral uprightness within this line of thought essentially consists in the intellect's correct understanding of what is conducive to happiness as proposed by Richard Cross in the following statement: "Presupposed in Aquinas' view is the belief that a correct understanding of the nature of happiness will entail acting morally."¹³²

Though popular in many Catholic circles, this will not be Scotus' view on the matter and Cross identifies two specific reasons why this is the case. The first, he claims, is that it does not do adequate justice to human freedom. Secondly, it does not take into account the nature of a natural power.¹³³ Primary within the Thomistic tradition, which follows a very Aristotelian model of freedom, is the intellect. Scotus on the other hand, will stand more firmly within tradition following Augustine, Anselm, and Bonaventure and place the will as primary.¹³⁴ Scotus believes it is self-evident from experience that the human person is free in the fullest sense. He also believes a distinction must be made between a free power and a natural power to prove this statement. Nature is defined as:

¹³¹ Richard Cross, *Great Medieval Thinkers: Duns Scotus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 84.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 85.

¹³⁴ Thomas A. Shannon, *The Ethical Theory of John Duns Scotus* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press/Quincy University, 1995), 30.

“the potency of itself is determined to act, so that so far as itself is concerned, it cannot fail to act when not impeded from without . . . a nature has not the power to determine itself in any other way.”¹³⁵

A free power, such as the will, is, “not determined, but can perform either this act or its opposite, or can either act or not act at all.”¹³⁶ Thus the will has the power to act in opposite ways, and, as Shannon will explain, this means that the cause of such actions cannot be found in anything but the will itself.¹³⁷ Such in-determinism, as Cross puts it, in an agent that is free is what Scotus refers to as contingency or the fact that A could have been B. In a system like Aquinas', such contingency arises in the intellect since no one can predict how the intellect's decision will turn out. In Scotus' mind, contingency arises in the will. He believes this to be self-evident because every time we make a decision we experience ourselves as having the ability to have made a different decision, or to have followed a different path. Thus the will is capable of choosing opposites.¹³⁸

None of this is to say that Scotus rejects the inclination that the will has towards its own fulfillment, which he will call the *affectio commodi* (the affection for what is beneficial or advantageous).¹³⁹ However, according to Scotus, the will must possess another affection which modifies this inclination and gives the person the ability to act

¹³⁵ John Duns Scotus, *Joannis Duns Scoti, Doctoris Subtilis Ordinis Minorum: Opera Omnia*, Vol. 7, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam IX*, q. 15, a. 2, (Parisiis: Apud L. Vives, 1894), 610; translation from Shannon, *The Ethical Theory of John Duns Scotus*, 35.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Shannon, *The Ethical Theory of John Duns Scotus*, 35.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ John Duns Scotus, *Bl. Joannis Duns Scoti: Doctoris Subtilis et Mariani: Opera Omnia*, Vol. 10, *Ordinatio III*, d. 26, nn. 17-18, (Civitas Vaticana: Typis Vaticanis 2007), 34-37; translation from Cross, *Great Medieval Thinkers: Duns Scotus*, 87.

freely. Such an affection he calls the *affectio justitiae* (the affection for justice), and is drawn directly from both Augustine and Anselm.¹⁴⁰ This prevents the will from acting as a pure nature, and allows it to will that which is right or just over what it perceives to be advantageous. Otherwise, situations in which the intellect presents the will with the choice to act for the beneficial or the just, the will would determinately choose that which is beneficial since it could not act contrary to its nature. As Shannon explains:

The *affectio justitiae* is the means by which we can transcend nature—the *affectio commodi*—and go beyond ourselves and our narrowly construed good. By means of the *affectio justitiae* we are able to seek the intrinsic value of an entity. . . . Such an understanding of will as *affectio justitiae* frees the will from the constraints of nature but does not subject it to rule by whim. . . . Rather, in keeping with his mentors, Augustine and Anselm, Scotus views freedom as 'a positive bias or inclination to love things objectively or as *right reason* dictates.'¹⁴¹

Due to his understanding of the *affectio justitiae*, Scotus avoids falling into voluntarism since the will has its perfection in following the internal or ordered good of the other as seen through right reason. Nevertheless, within this Scotistic understanding of freedom, it is the will and not the intellect which is considered rational since the intellect is not able to choose to know, but simply knows by its nature; whereas the will is able to discern or rationalize between different actions. As Mary Beth Ingram explains: “The intellect cannot refrain from knowing; it is by nature, i.e. necessarily, directed toward cognition. The will, by contrast, is different: the will can not only will something (*velle*) or not will it (*nolle*), it can beyond this also not will (*non velle*).¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ John Duns Scotus, Joannis Duns Scoti, Doctoris Subtilis Ordinis Minorum, Vol. 23, Reportatio Parisiensis II, d. 6, q. 2, n. 9, 621-622; translation from Shannon, *The Ethical Theory of John Duns Scotus*, 37, 38.

¹⁴² Mary Beth Ingram, *The Philosophical Vision of John Duns Scotus: An Introduction* (Washington D.C., MA: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 95; Cross, *Great Medieval*

In applying all this to God, Scotus will have the task of explaining how it is possible for the divine will to act in a way that is both free and necessary. Such an issue is beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus it will suffice to say that his answer to this difficulty in regards to the divine will is found within a doctrine he calls *firmitas* or steadfastness. It refers to the divine will's ability to reach its perfection, or to adhere to what consists in its perfection. Such a theme is again taken from Augustine and Anselm, and basically states that though the divine will is capable of opposite intentional objects, the only adequate object of love for an infinite will is another infinite being (the divine being). To quote William Frank: "To be possessed of the fullness of perfection is to be necessary and to be possessed of the fullness of perfection volition must have *firmitas*. Since God's self-love is possessed of the fullness of perfection, the same act is both free and necessary."¹⁴³

Creation's contingency:

In holding to all this, Scotus naturally believes the created world must be considered a contingent reality precisely because it depends upon the divine will for its existence. To say that something is contingent is to say that it may not exist at all, or it may exist in a way other than it exists at this moment. Ingram explains this point in the following statement: "The divine being is the ultimate cause without which nothing at all would exist. God's existence becomes, then, logically necessary, the *sine qua non* for the existence of anything."¹⁴⁴

Thinkers: Duns Scotus, 87; Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., *Duns Scotus on the Will & Morality*, trans. William A. Frank (MA thesis, The Catholic University of America, 1997), 35-37.

¹⁴³ William A. Frank, "Duns Scotus' concept of willing freely: what divine freedom beyond choice teaches us," *Franciscan Studies* 42 (1982): 81.

¹⁴⁴ Mary Beth Ingram, *Scotus for Dunces: An Introduction to the Subtle Doctor* (St. Bonaventure,

Creation's reliance upon the divine being, or the divine will, for existence, and its openness to exist in a way other than it exists now, makes the world contingent. But Ingram also explains elsewhere that within this contingent creation there is also a certain necessity, because God creates with a certain order in mind. Thus within this order of creation, there are certain things that will necessarily cause something else. However, such necessity is not the same necessity that is found in the divine being, which is the only thing that is strictly necessary since it is completely independent of anything else for its existence. All possibilities are actualized in the divine being and thus God could not exist in any other way; hence, He is perfect. The necessity found in creation Scotus calls [*large loquendo*] and it is not understood in the strict sense. This he calls [*stricte loquendo*] and it is understood to be found in the divine being precisely because the order and existence of creation depends upon God.¹⁴⁵

The contingency of the created world is an important principle to keep in mind in order to understand the nature of Scotus' arguments in regards to the primacy of Christ. Even though he will ultimately affirm the christocentric position, there are certain arguments in support of this position that Scotus will outright reject. Specifically, he will reject the aprioristic argument of Grosseteste and Alexander of Hales, or the idea that God as the *summe Bonum* will necessarily diffuse His goodness to the highest extent *ad extra*. Scotus is uncomfortable with such argumentation because it is based upon the demands of divine nature and its attributes. This is unacceptable for Scotus because we are dealing with a reality, the created universe, that depends solely on the free and

NY: St. Bonaventure University, 2003), 41.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 135; John Duns Scotus, *Bl. Joannis Duns Scoti: Doctoris Subtilis et Mariani*, Vol. 10, *Ordinatio III*, d. 37, q. un., n. 5, 279-284.

ordered will of God.¹⁴⁶ Such a critique is made in conformity with both St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas, because they all recognize that God acts *ad extra* in complete freedom. This makes the created order dependent upon the will of God, and any aprioristic arguments in regards to God's action in creation inappropriate.

Predestination:

From this it is clear that Scotus is not going to operate along the same lines as Alexander of Hales to support his position on the primacy of Christ. Instead, he turns to the other great New Testament evangelist, St. Paul, for his argument from predestination. In the first chapter of Ephesians, St. Paul makes the following statement: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing on high in Christ. Even as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love. He *predestined* us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as His sons, according to the purpose of His will. . .” (Ephesians 1: 3-5). In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul again mentions our predestination: “For those whom He has foreknown He also *predestined* to become conformed to the image of His son, that he [Christ] should be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). From this, we can say with certainty that we are predestined through Christ, implying that Christ himself is also predestined.

Putting the question within the context of predestination, specifically of Christ, is reminiscent of Rupert of Deutz. But Scotus will take the argument to its most complete potential through his understanding of love and freedom. This is expressed by Pancheri in

¹⁴⁶ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 18.

the following statement: “In its most general and fundamental meaning, the idea of predestination tells us in the first place that in carrying out the plan of salvation, God's will is in no way conditioned by creatures but is essentially sovereign and free. God's freedom (i.e. His love) is the beginning of all things; it is the ultimate explanation of the order of salvation which embraces both nature and grace.”¹⁴⁷

Scotus speaks of the issue of Christ's primacy in his *Ordinatio* and in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, and introduces the problem with his definition of predestination: “Predestination is the foreordaining of some being principally to glory, and to other things insofar as they are ordered to glory.”¹⁴⁸ Grace, merit, and the will's cooperation are a means to the glory which a created being is predestined. In this there is agreement between Scotus and Thomas, as it will be Thomas' disciples who will later be the greatest adversaries to Scotus' position. Both will also say predestination is absolutely gratuitous, a gift from God. Where they will eventually differ is in how it relates to the will of God.¹⁴⁹ Since predestination, and he is specifically speaking of Christ's predestination, is gratuitous, then it must be prior to the fall of Adam and cannot be conditioned by it in any way. To say that Christ's predestination is conditioned is to say that it is no longer a gratuitous gift of God apart from anything in creatures. As Pancheri explains, “If predestination is a gratuitous gift of God which in no way depends on the creature . . . it precedes the prevision of sin which is a defect and a privation. It cannot be

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴⁸ Scotus, *Ordinatio III*, d. 3, q. 3 quoted in Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 33. “Praedestinatio alicujus ad gloriam principaliter et ad alia in ordine ad gloriam.”

¹⁴⁹ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 33.

conditioned by anything positive-and much less negative-on the part of creatures.”¹⁵⁰

At this point, Scotus will relate Christ's predestination to the predestination of all other creatures in order to show the exact logic of his argument.

For, universally, he who wills in an orderly manner seems to will first that which is more proximate to the end. Thus, just as [God] first wills that someone should receive glory before [He will that he should receive] grace, so also among the predestined, to whom He wills glory, He seems ordinally to will first the glory of him whom He wills to be proximate to the end, and thus He wills the glory of this soul [of Christ] before that of some other soul, and He wills the glory and grace of anyone before He foresees the things that are opposed to these habits.¹⁵¹

Recall that the will is the rational aspect of the soul, according to Scotus, precisely because it is self-determining. It is not an indifferent potency, but is self-determining toward a foreknown good.¹⁵² At the level of the *affectio justitiae*, the will is able to go beyond itself and its own fulfillment to choose what is good or right for the other. All of this is done in conformity to what reason reveals to it as true. The perfection of the will lies at this level, and not as it is commonly held in society as through the ability to choose. What this means is that the more perfect the will the more it is able to choose the objective good.

For Scotus, the will intends something in an orderly way. The divine will, being the most perfect, must also be the most ordered of wills. God would not create something in a way that is inordinate. This means that God would not will a greater good for the sake of a lesser good because such a reality is disordered. To translate this into the issue of Christ's primacy, the Incarnate God could not have been willed or occasioned by the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Scotus, *Ordinatio III*, d. 3, q. 3 quoted in Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 34.

¹⁵² Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 34.

sin of Adam. To say this, one must essentially believe that God willed the greatest good of all creation, the physical body of Christ, merely for the sake of a lesser good, humanity. Thus it overturns the scale of “values being good.”¹⁵³ To put it simply, the principle by which we hold that the divine will is the most ordered, *ordinatissime volens*, prevents the possibility that the Incarnation was occasioned by anything outside of the will of God. The Incarnation is the greatest good of all creatures. There is nothing which God created which could be greater and more precious than the flesh of Christ. To say that the body of Christ was willed only in order to redeem sinful humanity is to say God wills in a disorderly manner.

The same principle must be applied to the predestination of Christ. As Pancheri puts it, “God willed Christ as the archetype, the cause, the end, the *mediator* of all the predestined. And since every predestination 'precedes' the prevision of the fall and is independent of it, *a fortiori* the predestination of Christ cannot depend on it either.”¹⁵⁴ Christ then becomes the center of God's actions *ad extra*, not an afterthought to remedy fallen humanity. Christ is first in the mind of God, figuratively speaking, before all other creatures because he is the *summum opus Dei*, the “masterpiece of God.” It is through Christ that God willed to communicate Himself in the most sublime of ways and introduce all his creatures to the truth of the blessed Trinity. All of this is expressed in a famous text from Scotus:

God first loves Himself; secondly He loves Himself for others, and this is an ordered love; thirdly, He wishes to be loved by the One who can love Him in the highest way-speaking of the love of someone who is extrinsic to Him; and fourthly, He foresees the union of that nature which must love

¹⁵³ Ibid., 35.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Him with the greatest love even if no one had fallen.¹⁵⁵

Thus we once again return to the principle which Scotus took from St. John the Evangelist, “Deus Caritas est.” God's act of creation is the result of the perfectly free and gratuitous love of God and its end lies in the creation of one capable of returning to God a perfect love; and thus, all of creation returns to God only through the God-man capable of a perfect love.¹⁵⁶

Many have confused what Scotus states about Christ being the end, the purpose and final cause of the created universe with Alexander of Hale's aprioristic arguments. In Scotus' thought, Christ can be understood as the greatest of God's works (the masterpiece of God), precisely because the God-man is the only creature that is able to return to God a most perfect love. However, as Pancheri claims, this means something different for Scotus than it does in Alexander's arguments. For him, “Christ is not the 'crown' and the 'zenith' of the universe, but rather its root, its end, its *raison d'etre*; and this -note well- not because of any aprioristic exigency on the part of the world, but exclusively because God freely and gratuitously willed all things to have their center and foundation *in Christo Jesu*.”¹⁵⁷ Scotus' arguments for the christocentric position are of a completely different nature than previous ones which have their foundation in the necessity on God's part, by his perfect nature, to bring His creation to its most perfect end. Scotus argues from perspective of St. Paul which concerns Christ's predestination, and our predestination in him. As St. Paul states: “He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God,

¹⁵⁵ John Duns Scotus, *Opus Pariensis III*, d. 7, q. 4 L ed. Balic, nn. 13-15; excerpt from Dean, *A Primer on the Absolute Primacy of Christ*, Appendix, 129.

¹⁵⁶ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 35.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 35, 37.

the firstborn of every creature. For in him were created all things in the heavens and on earth, things visible and invisible, whether Thrones, or Dominations, or Principalities, or Powers. All things have been created through him and unto him, and he is before all creatures, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15-17).

Fr. Maximilian Mary Dean will elaborate upon this Scotistic understanding of predestination as being characterized by two activities, one eternal and the other temporal. The first activity is what Fr. Dean will call intention or *ordo intentionis* and it describes the eternal activity of God. This activity, since it is eternal, takes place outside of time, and determines the end, purpose, the final cause of all God's actions *ad extra*. In speaking of the intention of God, we speak of the very reasons why God chose to act *ad extra* in the first place. The second activity Fr. Dean describes as the execution, or *ordo executionis*, of this eternal decree or intention of God, and it describes what takes place in time. The second activity is the gradual process by which God carries out his plan, the ongoing process of accomplishing His intentions *ad extra*.¹⁵⁸

Thus, subtly contained within Scotus' understanding of Christ's predestination is an understanding of *two* divine activities within the *one* divine plan. The first, intention, always precedes the second, execution. Though we can learn something of the intention through our observance of its execution, we could not know the fullness of God's intention until it was completed in Christ. To further demonstrate this point, Fr. Dean will use the analogy of a sculptor who first *intends* to build a statue of the Sacred Heart, and then *executes* this plan by taking chunks away from the wood, until he has created a

¹⁵⁸ Dean, *A Primer on the Absolute Primacy of Christ*, 28.

statue of the Sacred Heart.¹⁵⁹ Of course, all of this is to be understood in a figurative manner, as we are speaking of an eternal decree of the will of God which takes place outside of time. Thus describing God's plan using temporal language does not fully capture what is happening, but it is the only way for us, in our temporal existence, to comprehend what is primary in the mind of God.¹⁶⁰

This distinction between the intention and the execution, which Pancheri will also recognize and refer to, allows Scotus to explain how the Incarnation relates to redemption since he does not believe the latter is a condition for the former. Recall that this distinction was also made by St. Bonaventure, who acknowledged that it is a very subtle way of explaining the relationship between the Incarnation and redemption within the Franciscan framework. But Pancheri explains that “[I]t emerges clearly that Scotus regards the redemption as being one aspect of the Incarnation. Hence, contrary to the view of St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas, the Incarnation is not for the sake of the redemption, but vice versa.”¹⁶¹ For Scotus the Incarnation is primarily directed for the achievement of man's divine sonship, or as the East puts it, for man's divination in Christ. Redemption is considered an aspect of this overall plan that becomes necessary only after the fall. God is able to redeem man through the Incarnation should man be in need of it, but this is not the same as saying that the Incarnation is primarily directed toward redemption. Rather, the Incarnation is directed primarily to raise man up to divine sonship with Christ.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 40.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 44.

This claim affirms that God did become Incarnate “for us men and for our salvation” as so many previous authorities have claimed. The distinction that Scotus would like to make is that this is not the same thing as saying God became Incarnate *only* “for us men and for our salvation,” nor even *primarily* for this reason. It follows from this that what St. Bonaventure referred to as the substance of the Incarnation, equivalent to the *ordo intentionis*, was willed prior to sin. The substance of the Incarnation is what is intended in the will of God prior to anything else, and is completely and fully unaffected by anything that takes place *ad extra*. This includes the fall of Adam, since Christ is predestined before all creatures. What is affected by sin, as St. Bonaventure has already explained, is the modality of the Incarnation, which is equivalent to the *ordo executionis*. Once God foresaw man's fall into sin, He chose to utilize the potential of the Incarnation to redeem man through the death of His only begotten Son. Thus in the *ordo executionis* the Incarnation takes on a passible nature, one capable of suffering for the sake of man's redemption.¹⁶²

None of this is to say that it is inconsistent with the nature of the Incarnation to believe it could have been passible had man not sinned; but, as with everything else within the Scotistic framework, one could not say this is what God would have done necessarily. This is true even after the fall, because God acts in complete freedom and love, not by necessity. In the words of Scotus: “It was principally in order to attract us to His Love, as I believe, that this came about [Christ's act of redemption], and because God willed that men should be more fully drawn to Him.”¹⁶³ Nevertheless, even if the

¹⁶² Ibid., 46-47.

¹⁶³ Scotus, *Ordinatio III*, d. 7, q. 3 quoted in Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 47. “Ad alliciendum nos ad amorem suum, ut credo hoc praecipue fuit, et quia voluit hominem amplius teneri Deo.”

Incarnation would have been executed with a passible nature apart from sin, Scotus will say that Christ would *not* have come as a redeemer. “All authorities can be explained as meaning Christ would not have come as redeemer unless man had fallen, nor perhaps as passible.”¹⁶⁴

This allows him to overcome arguments many now pose as a critique of the Scotistic position. Such arguments attempt to say that if we are to remain consistent with the liturgical principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of prayer is the law of belief), how do we justify Scotus' position with the exultet that calls the fall a “happy fault which gave us so great a redeemer.” The Scotistic answer to this objection is simple. As Fr. Dean explains, the exultet does not say there would not have been an Incarnation without sin, only that there would not have been a redeemer, and this is a true statement even within the Scotistic framework, as we have just seen.¹⁶⁵ Pancheri will object to this opinion stating that it gives too much credence to the Thomistic thesis, but this objection is not well-founded in the minds of many within the Scotistic position.¹⁶⁶

Conclusions of the Scotistic formulation:

Scotus' position goes back to the order of love, and can be seen as a direct critique of the nature of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. We know this to be true because Scotus will directly speak of the thought of Anselm and synthesize it as such: “First we must see that

¹⁶⁴ Ibid quoted in Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 46. “Omnes autem auctoritates possunt exponi sic, scilicet quod Christus non venisset ut redemptor, nisi homo cecidisset, nec forte ut passibilis.”

¹⁶⁵ Dean, *A Primer on the Absolute Primacy of Christ*, 64-66.

¹⁶⁶ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 113-120.

according to *Anselm*, it was necessary for man to be redeemed. Second, that he could not be redeemed without satisfaction. Third, that the satisfaction was to be accomplished by the God-man. Fourth, that the more fitting mode was this, namely through Christ's passion."¹⁶⁷ Scotus affirms love as the principle of intelligibility *ad extra*, what he specifically rejects in Anselm are statements of necessity. As he explains: "All these things which were accomplished by Christ concerning our redemption were *not necessary* except on the presupposition that the divine ordination ordained that it should come about in this way, and then it was only necessary by consequent necessity that Christ should suffer; but nevertheless the whole was, simply speaking, *contingent*, both the antecedent and the consequent."¹⁶⁸ Here we see Scotus' understanding of the contingency of the created world, with the only necessity coming from the *firmitas* of the divine will (which again is only a result of the perfection of the divine will, or its steadfastness in choosing the good according the order of love).

This also means that God's actions *ad extra* are in no way dictated by sin and satisfaction as Anselm claims, for there is no tension between the order of love and the order of justice. The latter is simply an aspect of the former. Pancheri puts it as such: "There is no justice that necessarily demands a satisfaction through the death of the God-man. All the concrete modalities of the Incarnation, including the Passion and death on the Cross, are but different manifestations of the *ordo amoris*."¹⁶⁹ To Duns Scotus, the

¹⁶⁷ Scotus, *Joannis Duns Scoti, Doctoris Subtilis Ordinis Minorum: III Sentences*, Volume 14, d. 20, q. unica, 733; translation from Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 127. "Primo videndum est, secundum Anselmum, quod necessarium fuit hominem redimi. Secundo, quod non portuit redimi sine satisfactione. Tertio, quod facienda erat satisfactio a Deo-Homine. Quarto, quod convenientior modus fuit hic, scilicet per passionem Christi."

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 737.

¹⁶⁹ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 45.

Incarnation could not have been simply a remedy for the fall of Adam and Eve. Rather, it is the highest expression of the glory and love God receives from his creatures.

All of this is why Scotus also rejects any notion that there could have been a 'motive' for the Incarnation. Such language implies something outside of the divine will was its cause. Like St. Bonaventure, Scotus prefers to speak only of reasons for the Incarnation, because he believes that all things *ad extra* are the result of God's gratuitous, free, and loving will. But Scotus will openly reject the idea that the Incarnation was only for the sake of man's *reditus ad Deum* (return to God). Rather, he firmly believes it was also the beginning of our *exitus a Deo* (departure from the mind of God). Thus, while he does operate through an alternative set of arguments, his thought is firmly within the christocentric framework of his Franciscan predecessors, including St. Bonaventure. However, unlike St. Bonaventure, Scotus will also affirm that God is completely and fully faithful to His original intention. Thus there is no room in Scotus' argument for Bonaventure's hypothesis that there were two orders of salvation, one prior to the fall with God the Word directly as its head and one after the fall which had the Incarnate God as its head.

In reading Scotus on this question, one gets a further sense that he was more firmly rooted in the christocentrism of the Franciscan order than any of his predecessors; this may be the reason the question of Christ's primacy comes to a high point in him. As he will state, the only way to save Anselm is to “proceed upon the presupposition of divine ordination which has ordained that man should be redeemed in this way.”¹⁷⁰ One

¹⁷⁰ Scotus, Joannis Duns Scoti, Doctoris Subtilis Ordinis Minorum: III Sentences, Volume 14, d. 20, q. un., 738; translation from Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 127-128.

must completely abandon Anselm's hamartiocentrism and any sense of necessitarianism for the sake of the order of love. The problem is, as Pancheri points out, if you do this: "What remains of *Cur Deus Homo*? At any rate, Scotus rejects the Anselmian thesis because it is incompatible with the absolute primacy of Jesus Christ and the biblical concept of freedom."¹⁷¹ Prior to Scotus, both sides of the discussion were willing to admit the opposing position was at the very least fitting in terms of the Catholic faith. The only exception to this may have been Rupert of Deutz. It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the opposing opinion as compatible with the faith within the Scotistic framework; for it absolutely necessary to completely abandon the hamartiocentric view of the Incarnation and to proceed with the christocentric view to have an accurate understanding of the created order. He believes this is the consistent teaching of the Scriptures, as we see in St. Paul and St. John, and in complete conformity with the Fathers of the Church, especially those of the East.

Likewise, Scotus will have an equally critical opinion in regards to those who approach Christ's primacy from the perspective of the hypothetical. Daniel Horan cites this as one of the major differences that exists between the work of Robert Grosseteste and John Duns Scotus. "Scotus does not begin his effort, nor is he primarily concerned, with an alternative or hypothetical order. Rather, Scotus' approach begins with the Incarnation as a factual premise. This is not to suggest that Scotus' position bears no impact on a hypothetical reformulation of the question, but this is not his intention."¹⁷² Both Dean and Pancheri will observe the very same point in Scotus. Pancheri will even

¹⁷¹ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 46.

¹⁷² Horan, "How Original was Scotus on the Incarnation?," 385.

suggest how “obsolete” such a formulation has become under Scotus.¹⁷³ It is not a question of understanding what would have been in an alternate economy of salvation had Adam not sinned, but of understanding this economy of salvation at its most fundamental and deepest level; that is, from God's point of view or *ad mentem Dei*.¹⁷⁴ One could even say that Scotus' formulation clearly demonstrates why approaching the issue specifically from the hypothetical obscures the whole question. It simply leads to a mistaken understanding of what the question actually seeks to answer. All of this is why, under Scotus, the question of Christ's primacy becomes not just another theological question, but “the essential and all-encompassing theological datum.”¹⁷⁵

Conclusion

With the work of Duns Scotus completed, the disciples of St. Thomas found themselves in the midst of some difficulties they sought to overcome. Through various stages of development, the Thomistic thesis was enhanced in confronting Scotus' argumentation, though they were never able to completely reject it even if some, like Thomassin, tried.¹⁷⁶ Pancheri explains that thinkers including Cardinal Cajetan, the Salmanticenses (the Carmelite monks of the University of Salamanca), and Francisco Suarez all sought to either completely overcome Scotus' argumentation or incorporate

¹⁷³ Dean, *A Primer on the Absolute Primacy of Christ*, 9; Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 43.

¹⁷⁴ Dean, *A Primer on the Absolute Primacy of Christ*, 27.

¹⁷⁵ Pancheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 31.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-62; cf. Louis Thomassin, *Dogmata Theologica, III: De Incarnatione*, lib. 2, cc. 4-11 (ed. Parisiis, 1866), 189-249. Thomassin believed an Incarnation within man's innocent state was an offense against God since it distracted him from a pure or direct vision of the face of God. Thus he took an extreme and untenable position against Scotus by saying that the Incarnation could only be understood within the context of redemption, because only God's mercy could lead to such a degradation.

some of what Scotus had to say into the position of Thomas, so as to salvage what would be lost of the Thomistic system if they were to accept the arguments of Scotus. Some, such as the Dominican Ambrose Catarino, dissented from the Thomistic school and were very critical of this effort; Suarez is even cited in his *De Angelis* as eventually acknowledging the undeniable authenticity of Scotus' work, admitting that he could never convince himself of the Thomistic position, as hard as he had tried.¹⁷⁷

Such efforts of the Thomistic school bring to light the central point of this thesis. Although the question of Christ's primacy originally began as a hypothetical, its development demonstrates how much this perspective on the question can obscure its true nature. St. Bonaventure was the first to begin to see that the question has little to do with what would have happened in an alternate economy of salvation, and everything to do with properly understanding this present one. His attempts to justify maintaining both a christocentric view of the world and a hamartiocentric view of the Incarnation provide proof that the question cannot be passed over as a hypothetical thought experiment, for it fundamentally involves two irreconcilable viewpoints on the reality behind the created universe. Scotus even more forcefully promoted this idea. Though many after Scotus tried to reconcile these two positions, none have been able to do so satisfactorily. What this reveals is that such an inquiry provides foundational perspectives on God and the universe for further theological thought. That is why, no matter which position one holds, it is a fundamental and insurmountable mistake to understand the question from the

¹⁷⁷ Panheri, *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, 52-82; cf. Cardinal Cajetan, *Commentary on the Sentences in III Partem Summae Theologicae*, q. 1, a. 3 published in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis opera Omnia* (ed. Leonina, Romae, 1803) XI, 15-16; C.f. Salmanticenses, *Cursus Theologicus*, tomus IX, tractatus XXI: *De Incarnatione*, disp. II, dub. I, n. 8; ed. (Paris, 1879), 270; C.f. Francisco Suarez, S.J., *De Incarnatione*, disp. V, sectio 1, n. 3; *Opera omnia* (Parisiis, 1860) XVI, 198 and *De Angelis*, lib. VII, c. 13; ed. Vives (Parisiis, 1856), II: 880-891.

perspective of its hypothetical formulation.

Evaluating the work already done on the primacy of Christ by these Catholic theologians brings to light several aspects of the question which need further exploration. This thesis has revealed that the theological methodology of each thinker may actually have a role in determining how each theologian evaluated the issues at hand. Bonaventure and the Franciscan mindset provides us with an interesting perspective upon the relationship between the sciences of theology and philosophy, which seems to enforce the idea that theology, as an affective science, is best understood when it is lived out in the lives of believers. This strongly suggests that theological perspectives are not so isolated from the everyday lives of the people of God. Further exploration into how our theological perspective on the primacy of Christ affects the practical and pastoral lives of the people of God is needed. Such an inquiry is capable of furthering our understanding of the work of evangelization and the spreading of Gospel values.

Another interesting point open for further consideration is seen in that Western theology has for the most part accepted Anselm's hamartiocentric perspective of the Incarnation. The theological perspective of the East has developed in a way that it seems to be more favorable to the christocentric viewpoint. Even statements of the early Church Fathers favorable to the christocentric position mostly come from the Greek Fathers; whereas the Western Fathers, while remaining open to the christocentric viewpoint, tend to favor what will become the Anselmian perspective. Thus further studies could explore how exactly the christocentric viewpoint has affected, if at all, the development of theology in the East, and then how a greater acceptance of the Scotistic position would affect the unity between Eastern and Western theological traditions.

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