INCORPORATING XIAO 孝: EXPLORING CHRIST’S FILIAL OBEDIENCE THROUGH HANS URS VON BALTHASAR AND EARLY CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

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By

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INCORPORATING XIAO 孝: EXPLORING CHRIST’S FILIAL OBEDIENCE THROUGH HANS URS VON BALTHASAR AND EARLY CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

INCORPORATING XIAO 孝: EXPLORING CHRIST’S FILIAL OBEDIENCE THROUGH HANS URS VON BALTHASAR AND EARLY CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

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The principal goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the Confucian interpretation of xiao 孝 (“filial piety”) provides a fruitful hermeneutical lens for Christology in two respects. Most immediately, I argue the early Confucian xiao is a salutary resource for understanding, appreciating, clarifying, and amending the Christology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who gave profound importance to Christ’s obedience in his thought. More generally, I argue the Confucian reading of xiao can help theologians enter into the mysteries of the Church’s Christological dogmas and doctrines in new and expansive ways. Consequently, the main argument of the dissertation is that through Balthasar and the early Confucian tradition, we arrive at a rich and compelling orthodox account of Christ’s filial love and obedience.

After situating the dissertation’s theological approach to incorporating Confucian philosophy in chapter 1, the dissertation develops two sets of studies. The first is devoted to examining and exploring Balthasar’s Christology on its own terms. The second is similarly devoted to analyzing themes in the Confucian treatment of xiao on its own
terms. The final chapter of the dissertation undertakes a theological synthesis of these two studies, showing how the combination of Balthasar's theological vision and the Confucian philosophical distinctions produce fruitful reflections on how Christ’s filial obedience functions within and expresses his life as eternal Son.
献给嘉丽：只因有你，我完成了。

「你们做丈夫的要爱你们的妻子；正如基督爱教会，为教会舍己…为这个缘故，人要离开父母，与妻子连合，二人成为一体。」～以弗所的 5:25 & 31

「男女居室，人之大伦也。」～ 孟子，萬章上, 2

宴会上的神圣家族, 2015 年
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Learning is intrinsically social; writing about what one has learned only intensifies this observation. This dissertation is the fruit born out of the abundance of graces and gifts I have received from God, friends, family, and formational scholars who have lent their minds and eyes to this project. First and foremost, I owe tremendous thanks to the men who have most helped this dissertation come into being. Most doctoral students are fortunate to have one excellent Doktorvater; I can genuinely say I have had three.

I originally conceived the idea for this dissertation and began writing under the guidance and encouragement of Dr. Matthew Levering, with the plan to defend under his advisement. Even though he left the University of Dayton before I reached the qualification stage, he has continued to be charitable with reading drafts, offering extensive comment on the dissertation. Also, this study would have been frankly impossible were it not for the presence and guidance of Dr. Alexus McLeod at the University of Dayton. Not only did Dr. McLeod help me gain facility with classical Chinese, he also devoted much of his time to conversations about these texts and themes both in a reading course and informally. His encouragement and assurance that my analysis of the Chinese sources was legitimate rather than dilettante have been an inestimable solace in excavating these unique sources for theological significance.
Most of all, I owe a tremendous debt to my formal Doktorvater, Dr. Bill Portier. After Dr. Levering left Dayton, Dr. Portier graciously agreed to advise the project, even though it is well outside of his typical expertise and method in historical theology. He has shown me much about charity and pedagogy, not least in allowing me to maintain the project as I originally conceived it rather than re-shape it into a more comfortable format. Moreover, Dr. Portier’s gracious gifts of his time and energy in discussing the structure and argumentation were true sources of clarity as I struggled to find a way into this study, which threatened at many points to become unwieldy. In terms of approach, though I am not a historian, I have learned from Dr. Portier that historical context and foundation are not opposed to systematic theology, but complement it; hopefully, one can see traces of his influence throughout this study.

I also owe much to my committee members. Dr. Dennis Doyle and Dr. Jana Bennett have blessed me with their support and enthusiasm for the project. Dr. Peter Casarella, my outside reader, showed me much faith by agreeing to take on this role and help provide clarity along the way. A very great thank you is owed to Dr. D.C. Schindler, who graciously read and gave tremendous notes on chapter 1. Also I would like to thank those additional faculty members who served on my general examinations committees throughout my time at Dayton, Dr. Brad Kallenberg, Dr. John Inglis, Dr. Silviu Bunta, and Dr. Michael Carter. Thank you also to the professors as yet unmentioned who led seminars that shaped me as a scholar, Dr. Vince Miller, Dr. Sandra Yocum, and Dr. Anthony Smith. Dr. Fred Smith, who devoted much spare time to a Latin reading group, has been a joyous presence.
Apart from teachers, there is the clear gift of formal and informal conversation partners. I have been blessed to study at Dayton with several colleagues who have made me a better theologian and person. A very special thank you is owed to Matt Archer, Ben Heidgerken, Jason Heron, Alan Mostrom, and Robert Parks who helped me gain tremendous clarity about the project through conversation, and offered invaluable spiritual support. Thanks also to those in attendance when parts of this study were presented at the Midwest AAR, Midwest Conference on Chinese Thought, College Theology Society, Theologians of Ohio, and Stander Symposium meetings. Given the dependence of this dissertation on language resources not typically relevant to the University of Dayton community, I owe a tremendous amount to the ILL and OhioLink staff at Roesch Library, especially Chris Tangeman – without you, this project would not have been possible. And of course, thank you to all the lending libraries, especially The Ohio State University and Wright State University for their generous sharing of their East Asian holdings.

Finally, to family and friends. To my parents, Darrell and Brenda Brown, I think you for your love, prayers, and support; hopefully, this study will have made me a better son. To my in-laws, Woo Kim Wan and William Chong, without your prayers and help with Elliott, this dissertation would still be in my head. To my Godfather, Michael, I can barely express the significance of your presence in my life and how much you have taught me about the love of God. To the congregations and clergy at Emmanuel Catholic Church and Holy Angels Church in Dayton, and especially Alan, Sarah, Jason, Hannah, Robert, Julia, Amberly, and José, thank you for showing me what Christian charity is. A profound thank you to my dear friend Cameron Jorgenson and all he has meant to me as a
teacher and model of theological scholarship. Gratitude also goes to St. Maria Goretti, who is patroness of this rather modest study. I thank her for her prayers and model of holiness. It is justly humbling to remember a young virgin martyr knows incalculably more about God than a purported scholar. Anything fruitful here is doubtless due to the efficacy of her prayers rather than my skill or acumen.

Most of all, I am grateful to my beautiful family. To my children, Elliott, Emmett and any that may come in the future: you already inspire Baba 爸爸 to think great thoughts. Though you will likely never read any of my publications or this dissertation, you are the inspiration behind all of my intellectual efforts. The largest and most owed expression of gratitude goes to my beautiful, gracious, and eminently more virtuous wife, Jamie. I always knew you would make me a better person, Christian, and father; I had no idea you would define me as a scholar. Your commitment to your language and culture, and willingness to share them with me are the true root of this study. Your commitment to our marriage, capacity for forgiveness, and willingness to sojourn in Dayton during my studies have each been icons of grace that have made the study possible. I dedicate this dissertation to you, though it falls well short of what you are owed.

_Suspice, Domine, universam meam libertatem._

_Accipe memoriam, intellectum atque voluntatem omnem._

_Quidquid habeo vel possideo, mihi largitus es: id tibi totum restituo, ac tuae prorsus voluntati trado gubernandum._

_Amorem tui solum cum gratia tua mihi done, et dives sum satis, nec aliud quidquam ultra posco._
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.............................................................................................................. iv
DEDICATION........................................................................................................ vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS...................................................................................... vii
NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS.................................................................................... xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.................................................................................... xv
INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 1 – CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY:
SKETCHING AN INCORPORATIONAL APPROACH.................................................. 46

CHAPTER 2 – THE SPIRITUAL CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE OF
CHRISTOLOGICAL LOVE AND OBEDIENCE IN HANS URS VON BALTHASAR
........................................................................................................................................ 87

CHAPTER 3 – ARCHETYPAL OBEDIENCE: BALTHASAR’S CONCEPTION OF
CHRIST’S FILIAL OBEDIENCE AS ARCHETYPAL EXPERIENCE ....................... 120

CHAPTER 4 – MISSION, HISTORY, AND OBEDIENCE: CHRIST’S FILIAL
OBEDIENCE IN THEO-DRAMA............................................................................. 157

CHAPTER 5 – THE CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT OF XIAO IN
EARLY CONFUCIANISM............................................................................................. 204

CHAPTER 6 – “WHILE LIVING, SERVE THEM WITH LI”: XIAO AS PARENTAL
CARE.......................................................................................................................... 241

CHAPTER 7 – SERVE THE DEAD WITH LI: FILIAL LOVE AND OBEDIENCE IN
CEREMONIAL XIAO ................................................................................................. 284
NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

This dissertation engages scholarly discourse across several languages. In order to assist the reader in negotiating my treatment of the sources cited, I will briefly explain my approach. With regard to primary sources, much of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s corpus has now been translated into English and published as standardized editions, mostly by Ignatius Press of San Francisco, CA. When possible, I have cited Balthasar’s work in translation. When I have had to render a translation on my own, I mark it in the text.

With the primary sources of Confucian texts, there exist no “standard” translations, simply due to the amount of interpretation needed to render classical Chinese into modern English. Standard practice in studies of Chinese philosophy is for the author to treat texts in his/her own translation. This is my practice throughout the dissertation, unless otherwise noted in the footnote or text. Within my translations, I will often parenthetically include a key phrase in Pinyin (without tone markings) and then in Chinese characters. Similarly, when introducing a new Chinese word or in order to clarify the term in mind, I will write the term in Pinyin and provide the graph in parentheses. The goal here is to give the reader who lacks a foundation in the study of Chinese with a visual aid to help distinguish the concepts in play – thus, I have erred on the side of over-using the Chinese characters to allow the reader to follow more precisely.

Regarding secondary literature, sources on Balthasar present the greatest problem. The vast majority of scholarship on his thought has not been written in English. For this
dissertation, I have left the titles of non-English works untranslated. However, I have translated whatever quotations I cite from these works. Thus, when I quote from a non-English source, the quotation will appear in English, but I will keep the title in the original language. This will signal to the reader that the translation of the quote used is mine, unless otherwise stated. Occasionally, I will include the quote in its original language when my translation is more dynamically equivalent than literally equivalent.

A final note regarding secondary sources on Chinese philosophy. Circa the early 2000s, the Pinyin style of Romanization came to replace the long-standard Wade-Giles system. For example, Kung-tzu became Kongzi, and hsiao became xiao. With secondary literature that uses the Wade-Giles system, I have updated any quotations to fit the Pinyin style for sake of cohesion, but have left the Wade-Giles Romanization in the titles of the articles or books.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Hans Urs von Balthasar

“Catholic Philosophy”  “On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy”

CSL  The Christian State of Life

Ep  Epilogue

FG  First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr

GL (1-7)  The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics

Heart  Heart of the World

KB  A Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation

LAC  Love Alone is Credible

MP  Mysterium Paschale

My Work  My Work in Retrospect

OT  Our Task: A Report on the Community of St. John

TD (1-5)  Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory

TH  A Theology of History

Test Everything  Test Everything: Hold Fast to What is Good

TiS  Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism

TL (1-3)  Theo-Logic
## Journals in Chinese Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

The principal goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the Confucian interpretation of xiao 孝 (“filial piety”) provides a fruitful hermeneutical lens for Christology in two respects. Most immediately, I argue the early Confucian xiao⁠¹ is a salutary resource for understanding, appreciating, clarifying, and amending the Christology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who gave profound importance to Christ’s obedience in his thought. More generally, I argue the Confucian reading of xiao can help theologians enter into the mysteries of the Church’s Christological dogmas and doctrines in new and expansive ways. Consequently, the main argument of the dissertation is that through Balthasar and the early Confucian tradition, we arrive at a rich and compelling orthodox account of Christ’s filial love and obedience.

Laying out this goal is simple, but it raises several questions. First and foremost, the reader may ask why I focus on the Confucian tradition. Every theologian approaches the mysteries of revelation from a concrete perspective, formed biographically and intellectually. Biographically, I have married into a wonderful Malaysian-Chinese family with a strong sense of Chinese identity, in which I have been given a share. This dissertation is at one level an attempt to work out as a theologian what it means to live

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¹ This requires two qualifications. First, by “early Confucian,” I mean pre-Qin through Han era Confucian philosophy, ca. 5th century BC – 2nd century AD. For more precise dates and rationale, see chapter 5. Also, although “filial piety” is a suitable and popular translation of xiao, I will primarily keep the term untranslated throughout this dissertation in order to avoid defining its meaning too narrowly.
my family’s location in Chinese culture and Catholic *cultus*. Intellectually, I have undertaken serious study of early Chinese philosophies, especially Confucianism, and think these traditions provide profoundly helpful lenses for Christian theology. With Confucianism in particular, I find the rich and deep considerations of social anthropology and ritual therein to be exceptionally important philosophical insights that can aid Christian reflection.

Very well. Confucianism fits the author’s biographical and intellectual context. But how can this tradition from such a disparate context and worldview be used to serve Christian theology? Does this not amount to what Harold D. Roth has criticized as “cognitive imperialism”? The field of comparative theology, of which this work is a part,  

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2 See Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993); Carine Defoort, “Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy? Arguments of an Implicit Debate,” *PEW* 51 no 3 (July 2001): 393-413; Jana S. Rosker, “Traditional Chinese Thought: Philosophy or Religion?” *AP* 19 no 3 (Nov 2009): 225-37. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to Confucianism as a “philosophy.” This is for several reasons, but most simply it is because I am most conversant with philosophical readings of this tradition, and I seek to draw upon this tradition in a more philosophical way. However, Ching, Defoort, and Rosker, each approaching the problem from different angles, helpfully show that the debate about Confucianism as a “religion” or “philosophy” is not as helpful as it seems, since this distinction depends upon divisions in the Western academy. So, while I treat Confucianism as “philosophy” here, this should be taken to mean I consider Confucianism a “religious philosophy” and a “philosophical religion.”

3 Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1985); A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court Press, 1989); Bryan W. Van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2012). I recognize most theologians have little to no background in Chinese philosophy or history. Schwartz and Graham represent two very good and somewhat classic English introductions to Chinese philosophy, both providing excellent overviews of the schools, figures involved, etc. However, one should note that Graham’s interpretation on several points raises controversy, and I think it evinces an over-dependence on post-Enlightenment discourse. A newer, yet undoubtedly better place to begin entering the world of Chinese philosophy (particularly for the theologian) is Van Norden’s recent book.

4 Harold D. Roth, “Against Cognitive Imperialism: A Call for Non-Ethnocentric Approach to Cognitive Science and Religious Studies,” *Religion East and West* no 8 (October 2008): 1-26. Roth argues that there is a deep-seated ethnocentric bias among scholars of religion which leads them to assume that all human beings believe in God. It is precisely because this ethnocentrism is presumed and not critically engaged (as “unreflective ethnocentrism”) that it then becomes “cognitive imperialism,” which he defines specifically in terms of foisting an Enlightenment-style cultural superiority on other modes of thought. Although I disagree with Roth about the presence of transcendence in Chinese thought, I am sensitive to the question of “cognitive imperialism” and will address more in chapter 1 how I think the theological engagement I provide in this dissertation avoids this characterization.
has helped to soften this question broadly in terms of Asian cultures. James L. Fredericks, for example, has argued that comparative theologians “are interested in studying other religions on their own terms and then exploring their own Christian faith using what they have learned about the other religions.”\(^5\) Comparative theology, then, involves the conviction that traditions such as Confucianism can a) be understood on their own terms by the theologian, and b) be utilized by the theologian within the task of \textit{fides quaerens intellectum}.

Yet it is still a considerable challenge to articulate how the comparative theologian may accomplish this task, especially with such a context as ancient China. Recent monographs by Hyo-dong Lee and Bede Benjamin Bidlack have shown a general accessibility of Chinese to comparative theology particularly in view of anthropology.\(^6\) But what about Christology? How can we ask early Confucians to help marshal resources to reflect upon the central and unique Christian mystery of the Incarnation, and how do we discern what is helpful and what is not? In Chapter 1 of the dissertation, I address these questions by describing my comparative approach as one of “theological incorporation.” Here I draw heavily upon my experience of intercultural marriage and Balthasar’s conception of Christ as the \textit{Gestalt} of Truth.\(^7\) My basic contention is that just


\(^7\) Markus Enders, « Alle weltliche Schönheit ist für den antiken menschen die Epiphanie göttlicher Herrlichkeit» : Zur vorchristlichen Wahrnehmung des Schönen in der heidnischen Antike nach Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in \textit{Logik der Liebe und Herrlichkeit Gottes: Hans Urs von Balthasar im Gispersäch} (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2006), 26-44. Enders shows that Balthasar saw not only the Jewish covenant as preparation for Christ’s revelation, but also the ancient Greek philosophy and the perception of Beauty therein as a necessary \textit{praeparatio ad evangelium}. Now it is clear that Chinese philosophies were not part of the historical preparation for the gospel in the same way that Greek
as St. Justin Martyr saw Christ as the “seed-bearing Word” (spermatikos Logos) who sowed truth among ancient Greek philosophers, so too Christ is the “root of the Dao” (ben dao 本道) in ancient China.

This is to say both that all truth participates in Christ and that all truth is fit to serve the ultimate Truth revealed by him. In the words of José Arregui, “Christ is the center of truth of all religion and, in the same way, he is the proper field and country of all authentic elements of the religions.” Thus to call Confucian philosophy to serve Christian theology is neither code for imperially plundering Chinese thought, nor is it putting a Christian flag on a foreign land. It is rather an attempt to show how Confucian philosophy already functions within and has its place in the patria Christi, though of course not in the form of explicit doctrinal propositions.

One may then ask, why Balthasar and what role does he serve in this study? A large portion of my theological formation has come from attempting to follow Balthasar as a master and guide. When I entered the doctoral program at the University of Dayton, my goal was, in fact, to study Balthasar’s approach to the Incarnation. In my “apprenticeship,” two pieces of data struck me as full of possibility for a significant analysis. First was Balthasar’s admission that his work was “all too Mediterranean” and that an engagement with Asia could prove fruitful for his theology. Second, I realized philosophies were. However, the same basic insight of Balthasar regarding how pagan Greek philosophies are preparing the way for, yet are nonetheless reconfigured through God’s revelation of Christ as Truth provides a way to “locate” Confucian philosophy in the drama of revelation as well.

José Arregui, OFM, Urs von Balthasar: dos propuestas de diálogo con las religiones (Vitoria: ESET, 1997 – published as vol. 67 of Victoriansia), 41.

GL I, 11. “The overall scope of the present work naturally remains all too Mediterranean. The inclusion of other cultures, especially that of Asia, would have been important and fruitful. But the author’s education has not allowed for such an expansion, and a superficial presentation of such material would have been dilettantism. May those qualified come to complete the present fragment.”
that his conception of Christ was indeed grounded in obedience, but that this was a complex theme in Balthasar’s hands, focused on Christ’s life as the eternal Son. Given this theme and the fact that filial piety is a central teaching in Confucian philosophy, the basic engagement for the dissertation was readily apparent.

As to Balthasar’s role in the study, in general I turn to Balthasar to construct a “theological space” within which to consider Christ’s obedience. This does not mean I think Balthasar offers a comprehensive statement of orthodox dogma on Christ’s obedience or that I see his approach as the only legitimate one. Neither does it mean Balthasar will provide questions that the Confucian xiao will have to answer. Balthasar is helpful because his account of Christ’s filial obedience is rich, complex, and compelling, and also negotiates the doctrinal implications of Christological obedience. Thus, it provides some definition to Christ’s obedience from a theological perspective that allows us to see what aspects of the Confucian xiao can assist the sort of Christological reflection Balthasar models. Chapters 2 through 4 thus establish a framework through Balthasar for approaching the mystery of Christ’s obedience.¹⁰

Part II, comprising chapters 5 through 7 of the dissertation, presents a study of the Confucian xiao. In these chapters I argue that early Confucians understood xiao as the virtue of filial love tending toward the enactment and perfection of that love in concrete acts of filial obedience, particularly in ritual acts. This is to consider love not merely as an “emotion,” but as a habitus (much like the Christian caritas) that compels particular acts if it is to be expressed (chapter 5). The “filial grammar” then of the Confucian xiao

¹⁰ At the same time, one should note I do not hope to merely rehearse Balthasar’s understanding of Christ’s obedience. See section 2 below for the relevance of this study to literature on Balthasar’s Christology.
primarily concerns the acts of care and service for one’s parents (chapter 6) and the ceremonial rituals of mourning and ancestral sacrifice (chapter 7).

The fruit of this approach is harvested in chapter 8. Throughout parts I and II, I strive to maintain a clear distinction in the studies of Balthasar and Confucianism, in order to hear each voice in distinction before attempting to hear them “sound together.” In chapter 8, I draw upon these distinct voices to suggest what it can mean for xiao to be incorporated into Christian theology. My goal in this chapter is to show three things: 1) how Confucianism can clarify, intensify, and amend important themes in Balthasar’s portrait of Christ’s obedience; 2) how Balthasar’s Christology and the Confucian xiao are mutually enriching; and 3) how the trajectories suggested in both lead to a mystagogical encounter with the mysteries of Christian faith. This chapter is thus primarily speculative or heuristic and for that reason, is provisional. Though I think it would be possible to more deeply explore the conclusions I make in the final chapter, such an exploration of each theme I present would require a much broader theological engagement. For the sake of space and focus of the dissertation, I have left this task to the future.

The remainder of the introduction addresses a final question our reader may now pose: what is the significance of this dissertation for the academic study of theology? Aside from the novelty of drawing upon Confucian philosophy for mystagogical reflection, there are three areas of impact of this dissertation on scholarly literature.

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11 Matteo Ricci, The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu shiyi), trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, ed. Edward J. Malaltesta (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985); John H. Berthrong, All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994); Catherine Hudak Klancer, Embracing Our Complexity: Thomas Aquinas and Zhu Xi on Power and the Common Good (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2015); H-D Lee; and Bidlack. Matteo Ricci authored the classic theological engagement with Confucian philosophy in a Western language. However, there are two important qualifications. First, Ricci’s Confucianism was in actuality what is known as Neo-Confucianism, i.e., a Confucian philosophy revitalized and restructured by the thought of scholars from the Song and Ming dynasties such as Zhu Xi. This study, however, emphasizes Warring States through Han
First is the study of Balthasar’s Christology in general and American interpretations of his Christology in particular. Second are readings of Confucianism and particularly xiao among scholars of Chinese philosophy, though I am especially concerned with engaging Western readings of the concept. And third are contemporary debates regarding the nature of Christ’s obedience and how one approaches this topic. In what follows, I will attempt to only briefly demonstrate these points of impact; the reader should note that throughout the dissertation I clarify especially in footnotes how my insights compare to extant interpretations of our themes in Balthasar and Confucian studies.

2. Contextualization: Readings of Balthasar’s Christology

In Chapter 2, I offer an extensive contextualization of the spiritual foundation and structure to Balthasar’s Christology, which also serves as an introduction to Balthasar’s biography and background. Also, throughout chapters 2-4, I offer engagement with the scholarly literature on certain points of interpretation and thus “contextualize” my interpretation throughout. Thus in this section, I do not exhaustively detail the relation between this dissertation and scholarly literature on Balthasar’s thought, but merely give voice to its central contribution in two respects: a) Christological studies of Balthasar’s thought, and b) the American Catholic discourse about his Christology.

Confucian texts, which is substantially different. Second, Ricci was not concerned primarily with drawing upon Confucian philosophy as he was in showing its resonance with Christian theology in a Thomistic key. While some have called foul at this, I would argue Ricci’s reading of Confucian philosophy under a Thomistic lens is important and legitimate; it is simply not the same kind of reading I provide here, which will seek to use Confucian thought as a philosophical lens for doing Christian theology.

The Berthrong and Klancer volumes are distinct from the present work in that they are more explicitly comparative, and draw upon a different theological model for engagement; especially this is so in regard to Berthrong who is within the process theology tradition. Lee and Bidlack’s volumes are important conversation partners for this study as both attempt forms of something like the mystagogical model I lay out here. However, my focus on Confucianism in particular is distinct. Moreover, my account of how such incorporation can take place and how to go about appropriating Chinese traditions departs in significant ways from the approaches taken by Lee and Bidlack.
2.1. Christological Studies of Balthasar’s Thought

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) wrote a voluminous corpus that is staggering in its size, depth, and variety of sources. His reader notices the recurrence of several basic themes regarding Christ’s person and work – Christ as form of revelation of Triune love in obedience, as God’s encounter with history, as centered on his mission, and an emphasis on Holy Saturday – rehearsed in various ways. The challenge facing his interpreters lies not so much in identifying the basic elements of his Christology, but rather the principles that organize and vivify his understanding of Jesus Christ.

In general, the variations among specialists of Balthasar lie primarily in how they choose to approach his corpus. The oldest method, as practiced in the first two monographs written on Balthasar’s Christology, was to use the theological aesthetics as the guiding principle. Giovanni Marchesi’s landmark study is fundamentally aimed at walking the reader through what Balthasar means by Christ as the “figure” or form (Gestalt) of revelation. Similarly, Hanspeter Heinz’s monograph argues that Balthasar’s unique Christological approach (Ansatz) is that he perceives the “formal wholeness” of

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12 Manfred Lochbrunner, Analogia Caritatis: Darstellung und Deutung der Theologie Hans Urs von Balthasars (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 22. Lochbrunner invokes the hermeneutic circle as a “circulus vitalis,” noting that to represent a thinker is to already give an interpretation (…in der Darstellung des Ansatzes bereits eine Deutung des Werkes). With Balthasar, as Lochbrunner notes, there are several possibilities in the “representation,” and hence finding a way into his corpus is already a manner of interpretation.

13 GL 1-7. Originally published as Herrlichkeit from 1961-69, this work was the first movement of Balthasar’s trilogy comprising also the Theo-Drama (Theo-Dramatik) and Theo-Logic (Theo-Logik). The first movement focuses on the long neglected transcendental property of Being, Beauty.

Christ both dogmatically (as connected to the doctrines of the Trinity and soteriology) and historically (in the unity of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday). \(^{15}\)

These readings were historically limited in a sense due to the fact that the Christologically decisive volume of the *Theo-Drama* was not published until 1978. \(^{16}\) Yet they also speak to a tendency among scholars of Balthasar’s thought to find, in the words of Karl J. Wallner, a “structural principle” (*Strukturprinzip*) to his thought. For Marchesi and Heinz, the theological aesthetics seemed to present a systematic structure to make sense of Balthasar’s Christology. Wallner himself has argued that, “the recourse to the Trinity is the matrix of Balthasar’s theology.” \(^{17}\) Similarly, Georges de Schrijver has argued that Balthasar’s thesis of an *Ur-kenosis* in God (i.e., the original “giving himself away” of the Father) is the systematic principle that guides Balthasar’s thought, although not necessarily propitiously. \(^{18}\)

There are two problems with these approaches in terms of Balthasar’s Christology. First and foremost, Balthasar was famously allergic to the notion of systematization – this doesn’t mean he is really without a system, only that his reflections are not intended to be


\(^{16}\) Henriette Danet, *Gloire et Croi de Jésus-Christ: L’analogie chez H. Urs von Balthasar comme introduction à sa Christologie* (Paris: Descléé, 1987). Danet is an example of how the sense that Balthasar’s Christology is structured by the aesthetics has persisted after the publication of *Theo-Drama*. According to Danet, “[Balthasar’s] theological oeuvre is completely spanned (traversée de part en part) by an aesthetic analogy” (17), emphasis original. However, to be completely fair, only the first volume of the *Theo-Drama* had appeared in French by 1987.


systematic in the strict sense. Yet, even if we press on to say there is a structural principle, it does not seem apt to say it lies in either an aesthetic perspective or a Trinitarian doctrine. Particularly with the theses of Wallner and de Schrijver, the notion that Balthasar has a theory of the Trinity that then informs the rest of his thought seems quite backwards from Balthasar’s basic instinct that the economy is determinative for what is said of God’s immanent life. I would contend that Balthasar’s aesthetic vision and Trinitarian convictions come out of his encounter with God in Christ – they are not a priori to this encounter, but are revealed as essential because of the form of revelation.

Along with Vincent Holzer, I argue that the content of revelation, which is primarily gleaned from the Gestalt Christi, is what drives Balthasar’s theology in general and his Christology in particular, or at least his encounter with divine revelation. There have been several who have noted that at the heart of Balthasar’s understanding to the revealed content of Jesus is his obedience. According to Arno Schilson and Walter Kasper, Balthasar’s is a “Christology of obedience” (Gehorsamschristologie). Schilson and Kasper argue that for Balthasar, “Christ himself, his form of existence, his obedience

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19 At least since his study of Karl Barth, Balthasar had been wary of allowing a systemized “thought form” (Denkform) attempt to “contain” revelation. See KB, 251-66.

20 Balthasar himself notes as much is at risk in the foreword to Marchesi’s excellent study. See Marchesi, La cristologia di Hans Urs von Balthasar, viii-xi. N.B. Balthasar’s foreword is included in both German and Italian.

21 The aesthetics itself place emphasis on the objective evidence of God’s revelation. It seems then, more correct to say the objective evidence itself leads to the need for a theological aesthetics and is more central to Balthasar’s theology, even though I admit they are not wholly distinct theses.

22 Vincent Holzer, Le Dieu Trinité dans l’histoire: Le différend théologique Balthasar-Rahner (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 15. “According to Balthasar, the act of the opening of the divine according to his way of being is given in the absolute Christological mediation…” Holzer identifies this emphasis on Christ as the absolute “giving” of God’s self can be called an “aesthetical reasoning” (raison esthétique), but the emphasis lies first and foremost on what is given, rather than collecting first a schema.

in love, is the norm of all history: his obediential existence encompasses the past, present, and future, in which they are granted sole continuity before God.”

Similarly, Philippe Barbarin states that one of Balthasar’s major insights is that “it is the obedience of the Son which reveals Trinitarian love.”

This insight that Christ’s obedience is the content of revelation is given greatest exploration in Michel Beaudin’s vastly important *Obéissance et solidarité*, still the only monograph to be published on this theme in Balthasar’s thought. According to Beaudin, Balthasar presents obedience as the “véritable étoffe” of the figure of Christ, and is the key term in understanding Christ as revealing God’s Trinitarian and soteriological love. Dramatically, the love of Jesus is shown to be obedience that comes in solidarity with humanity. To Beaudin, the obedience of Christ is how Balthasar understands God opening up his “perspective” to the participation of the human perspective in God: God reveals his glory so that we may perceive and adore the glorious one. Jesus’ obedience is above all the locus of the “return to the center” (*exitus-reditus*), wherein God is “not unknowable; he is incomparably manifest” to humanity.

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24 Ibid., 67.


26 Michel Beaudin, *Obéissance et solidarité: essai sur la christologie de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Montreal: Corporation des Éditions Fides, 1989). Beaudin’s work is rarely cited, and has not had the influence I think it deserves on the field. Most likely, the reason lies in oversight of precisely how important Christ’s obedience is to Balthasar’s thought, which itself seems due to overlooking the importance of works like *The Christian State of Life* and discomfort with his partnership with Adrienne von Speyr.

27 Ibid., 18.

28 Ibid., 27.

29 Ibid., 28.
In general, my argument in this dissertation follows Beaudin’s insight that obedience is the center of the Christ-formed encounter of the Triune God within history. However, there are two great qualifications. First, unlike Beaudin, I do not think it is best to approach this theme in Balthasar from the structure of the trilogy as such. Rather, drawing inspiration from Jacques Servais, Werner Löser, Mark A. McIntosh, and Michele M. Schumacher, I argue that the spiritual experiences of Balthasar are key to understanding his conceptualization of Christ’s obedience (chapter 2). Fundamentally, this is because I am convinced that Karl Rahner is accurate in his description of the principle of “inner unity” that underwrites the “amazing versatility” of Balthasar’s theology: “[it is] a highly intelligent ‘spirituality’... a theology which comes from prayer, and serves the Church, and never allowed to be art for the sake of art.”

Second, Beaudin tends to treat obedience as a one-dimensional term. However, I find that Balthasar’s Christology is immensely creative, gesturing towards the unique contours of filial obedience as the center of the Christ form. Marchesi did give voice to this feature of Balthasar’s thought both in 1977 and in a later volume, but he did little more to point to its existence. In this dissertation I try to not only show these contours, but to develop and explore them. Once we have gained this center, I find it is fruitful to turn to the shape of the aesthetic and dramatic works of the trilogy as ways of organizing

30 “The trilogy” refers to what are generally treated as Balthasar’s opera maxima, Herrlichkeit, Theo-Dramatik, and Theo-Logik (with the small Epilog as well). These works are an extended theology built on the transcendental properties of Being: beauty, goodness, and truth.


32 See Marchesi, La cristologia di Hans Urs von Balthasar, 247-54.
Balthasar’s understanding of Christ’s filial obedience. The first major shape I wish to show, in harmony with theses of Edward T. Oakes and Jose Arregui, *inter al.* is that Christ’s filial obedience is unique and normative as the “archetypal experience” of Christian life (chapter 3). The second contour is that Christ’s obedience is comprehensively filial because it flows out of his self-knowledge as Son, and hence his obedience is imbued with his unique filial mission and consciousness (ch. 4).

2.2. American Discourse on Balthasar’s Christology

Before the publication of the English translation of the *Theo-Drama*, American Catholics had very little discussion of Balthasar’s Christology as such. There were two important exceptions: an essay by Paul E. Ritt printed in *Theological Studies* in 1988, and Edward T. Oakes, SJ, who completed his dissertation on Balthasar’s theo-dramatic Christology in 1987. However, after the final three volumes of the *Theo-Drama* appeared (1992-1998), interest especially in critiquing Balthasar’s Christology exploded in the US.

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33 In this sense, I think Balthasar can be “systematized” as long as we recognize this is a secondary effort useful in gathering together the vast corpus of his thought in accessible ways. One major reason for this is I am leery of over-emphasizing the aesthetics or dramas as the center of Balthasar’s thought. Though I find them ripe for analysis because these volumes rehearse in efficient fashion much of Balthasar’s themes, they are still operating within a corpus that is not merely an aesthetic or dramatic project. Hence, works such as *The Heart of the World* (1945), *Karl Barth* (1950), and *A Theology of History* (1954) are to my mind fundamental to Balthasar’s Christological thought; even though they fall outside of the trilogy’s structure, they are thematically related to and even anticipate the trilogy. My use of the trilogy as an organizing point does not displace this point, as I hope to show in my use of such sources.

A series of articles appearing in the *Thomist* in the early 2000s were the first wave, particularly those by Bertrand de Margerie and Guy Mansini. These essays were not so much critical of Balthasar’s Christology per se, but rather the conclusions Balthasar makes about the divine life through his Christological reading of the Trinity. Somewhat ironically, these essays and the responses to them simultaneously drew attention to the “idiosyncracies” of Balthasar’s Christology – his emphasis on Holy Saturday, his conception of Christ’s experience of abandonment, his use of obedience as receptivity – but also displaced these Christological insights with their implications for the doctrine of the Trinity in particular.

The single greatest example of this type of move is Alyssa Pitstick’s controversial *Light in the Darkness*. Pitstick focused her analysis on the question of whether Balthasar’s rather unique account of Holy Saturday (see chapter 4) is in keeping with Church tradition on the matter. Her answer is a resounding no, for two main reasons. First, Pitstick argues that the tradition has always held that Christ’s descent is not expiatory (as Balthasar does), but is instead triumphant (whereas Balthasar sees it as the ‘silence’ of

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36 Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Being as Communion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Healy’s response is at once the most representative and original of responses to these critiques of Balthasar. It is representative because Healy shows his debts, shared with David L. Schindler and Adrian J. Walker, to W. Norris Clarke’s ontological concept of the active reception of Being. His thesis is the most original because Healy argues contra Mansini in particular that Balthasar’s conception of the Trinity is not only in harmony with Thomism, but also advances Thomistic ontology.


death). Second, Pitstick claims the tradition has held that Christ did not descend beyond limbo, thereby only visiting the redeemed in Hell.

Pitstick’s thesis drew much attention to Balthasar’s teaching on Holy Saturday, but in a sense away from his Christological perspective. This is because in responses to her thesis, Paul J. Griffiths voiced a concern about her sense of the “consensus” of tradition that Pitstick claims and Oakes specifically pointed to problems of her thesis regarding limbo.\(^{39}\) Interestingly, this drew Balthasar in to a wider conversation about the development of dogma, particularly in Oakes who invokes John Henry Newman to respond to Pitstick. Hence, the questions were not “why does Balthasar think it important and necessary to depict Holy Saturday as he does,” but rather, “how does Balthasar’s Christology fit into the schema of Church doctrine and dogma?” This latter question is important, of course, but it seems to me it is also dependent upon some answer to the former. If we fail to understand the Christological structure that gives meaning to particular emphases such as Holy Saturday, can we really grasp what Balthasar means by them?\(^{40}\)


\(^{40}\) As I have intimated above, Oakes and others are not blind to this need and I follow much of their insights in the following. The difference is that I argue a thick reading of Balthasar on filial obedience is a fundamental task in interpreting Holy Saturday and his Christology in general. I contend through revisiting this especial theologoumenon we can understand the motivations behind Balthasar’s account of Holy Saturday.

That said, there is one major other task that Oakes and others have not readily attended to that would be necessary in defending the dogmatic viability of Balthasar’s conception of Holy Saturday. Because Balthasar depended so heavily upon Adrienne von Speyr’s mystical experiences, one would first have to consider the dogmatic role of private revelation and mystical experience. This is to say, Balthasar’s theology of Holy Saturday presumes that private revelation can inform more dogmatic content of theology – it is this conviction that seems to me to be the primary question in discussing his view of Holy Saturday and must be negotiated before assessing the Christology he presents on its own merit.
In this light, my presentation of Balthasar is hopefully similar to the project of Michele M. Schumacher’s recent masterful volume *A Trinitarian Anthropology*.*41* Schumacher thinks that revisiting Trinitarian-grounded anthropology as it is found in the cooperative theologies of Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr can lead to significant *rapprochement* with the theology of Thomas Aquinas and the Thomist critics of Balthasar. While my argument is neither an attempt to reconcile Balthasar and Thomism nor to persuade critics to renounce their consternation at certain aspects of Balthasar’s thought, I nonetheless am convinced that understanding the presentation of filial obedience in Balthasar helps clarify his Christological perspective.

A final word must be said about the most important American work on Balthasar’s Christology that is a significant context for this dissertation. Mark A. McIntosh’s *Christology from Within* is a true novelty within Balthasar studies and especially within the American community. Perhaps because of a weighty footnote in Oakes’ influential *Pattern of Redemption*, American theologians have shown a tendency to either ignore the biographical aspects of Balthasar’s life or limit them to introductory matter.*42* However, by doing so, many overlook the profound influence that the Ignatian

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42 Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 1. *Pattern of Redemption* has proven to be the most influential introduction to Balthasar’s thought in the US community, and is by any estimation an excellent study. However, in the first footnote of the book, Oakes reports that “Balthasar had little interest in his own biography, and this work introducing his thought has even less. Fortunately, his cousin has usefully summarized all the biographical details that are necessary for our purposes” and goes on to provide a heavy quotation from an essay by Peter Henrici, SJ concerning the circumstances of Balthasar’s birth, etc. Thus, Oakes implicates a significant division between Balthasar’s biography and his theology, though this is betrayed almost immediately as Oakes continues to situate Balthasar’s thought in the context of his life as a Jesuit and his meeting Adrienne von Speyr, though very briefly (see 2-5).

The substantive point here is that Oakes relegates Balthasar’s biographical information to introductory matter that is ultimately not very significant to his analysis of Balthasar’s thought. American
Exercises, *inter al.*, had on Balthasar’s life and thought. McIntosh lends keen attention to the Ignatian and mystical foundation of Balthasar’s Christology, particularly to the Balthasar’s thesis that the lives of the saints (rather than just their thought) are essential to the Christological science (i.e., doing Christology is done from “within” the encounter with Christ).

My reading of the “spiritual structure of Christ’s obedience” in Balthasar (chapter 2) is a similar attempt to point out that the spiritual experiences of Balthasar matter for understanding his Christology. In this sense, the argument I present is novel in the American context for considering Balthasar’s biography as substantively important for interpreting his thought. Moreover, the argument is unique in that it stresses the triptych of St. Ignatius, Adrienne von Speyr, and the Community of St. John as important for Balthasar, as each figure or community is too often neglected in American interpretations.

3. Contextualization: Readings of Xiao

3.1. Meaning and Scope of Xiao

*Xiao* is often translated as “filial piety.” A popular conception of *xiao* among non-specialists is that the term refers to the Chinese/Confucian belief that a child must do everything one’s parents instruct them to do and then give them ancestor worship after death. This interpretation is overall very simplistic and moreover shaped by presuppositions that come from living in a Western post-modern world. Throughout the dissertation my goal will be to argue not only for a more complex conception of *xiao* but Catholic readers of Balthasar by and large have followed this structural move and not typically considered Balthasar’s biography as significant for analyzing Balthasar’s theology. In chapter 2, I strive to draw upon Balthasar’s spiritual experience as a key departure for examination of his Christology, which is a clear structural departure from the normal tone of American Catholic studies.

also for its centrality to the Confucian school. However, in order to argue for the latter, we must provide some ground for understanding the former. The first step to take is thus to open up room for interest in examining xiao philosophically.

It is difficult to know much about Chinese history before the Qin and Han dynasties simply because the amount of data about life in Zhou and Shang China, particularly as regards family structure, has yet to be discovered. Keith N. Knapp is the foremost authority on filial relations in early China, and his research is to my mind the best guide for establishing the preliminary parameters of xiao. In a 1995 article, Knapp laid out how the Confucian school – known in Chinese as the Ru jia 儒家 – “reinterpreted” the concept of xiao it had received from earlier Zhou and Shang tradition. In the Shang dynasty – the earliest source of Chinese archaeology – Knapp argues that the term xiao surrounded the meaning of feeding or providing a feast for long deceased ancestors. Hence the graph for xiao 孝 represents a child or son (zi 子) offering something up to an elder (lao 老).

In the earlier part of the Zhou dynasty there had already been a shift in this concept. Xiao was still mainly given through feeding or sacrificing, but it came to stress more immediate ancestors. However, at this time xiao was not aimed specifically at one’s parents. Rather, “Zhou sacrifices were now primarily directed towards the closest

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44 The Zhou (1045 BC-221 BC) was the dynasty in which Confucius lived and in which Chinese philosophy began; the Shang preceded it and is the era from which the earliest archaeological finds have been discovered. See chapter 5 for a treatment of the historical context of the Zhou.

45 The school the West knows as “Confucianism” is not historically original from Confucius, though he is its most important figure. Rather, the Ru were literati in ancient China who studied the ancient classics and rituals, and were primarily active as “handing down” the traditions of the ancient sage-kings. That Confucius is located within this school rather than founding it is of great importance. However, since most readers have familiarity with the term “Confucianism,” I have retained this Latinized form, rather than stress the technically more correct terminology of Ruism.
ancestors, i.e., the sacrificer’s father and grandfather, and those individuals and groups who directly aided his family, such as his lineage, friends, in-laws, or the spirits. During the time preceding Confucius’ initial philosophizing about *xiao*, the traditional meaning of the term was associated primarily with sacrificing to ancestors in general, though growing closer to one’s parents as the central node in the relationship.

Confucian philosophy flourished in the Warring States period of the Zhou dynasty, and Knapp contends a very important shift in the *Ru* interpretation of *xiao* occurred there. The first shift is that the Confucian philosophical discourse on *xiao* began to distinguish between living parents and dead ancestors. While clearly earlier Chinese had been aware of the distinction between living and dead, the distinction was not ensconced in the structure of *xiao*. Second, the Confucians emphasized *xiao* as proper mourning for a parent or grandparent’s death in addition to being concerned with sacrifices. As Knapp puts it, the Warring States Confucians “[gave] as much importance to the hitherto unheralded mourning ties as it [did] to the venerable sacrificial ones.” Third, the Confucian philosophical school profoundly emphasized one’s parents as recipients of *xiao*. Hence service of food to the dead became emphasized as serving the living, which in turn morphed into a sense of *xiao* as dealing with obedience to one’s parents.

The thrust of this admittedly incomprehensive discussion is to simply point out that the early Confucian account of *xiao* both drew heavily upon earlier traditions and was immensely creative. Consequently, it raises serious questions about the philosophical reasons that lie behind this shift that Knapp reports. In particular, since *xiao* was a common term of Chinese grammar understood as having a very different function in

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Confucianism than in some rival schools, what did early Confucians think *xiao* accomplished? My argument in Part II of the dissertation shows I think the early Confucian *xiao* shows profound philosophical depth, movement, and definition, and leads those who will study it into a rich account of filiality.

3.2. Reception of Xiao

Unfortunately, my reading of *xiao* as a rich account of filiality is somewhat novel. For a very long time, many scholars in China and in the West have looked upon *xiao* with disdain and opprobrium. There seem at least two reasons for this. First, because Western philosophy has not traditionally emphasized the family as *philosophically* important, it seems many Western scholars consider *xiao* to be something important socially and thus part of the Confucian worldview, but not a very central aspect. Second, and much more important, the general *élan* that has characterized the West since the Enlightenment – individualism, liberalism, populism, and anti-institutionalism – has fed both Western and Chinese readings of *xiao*. Consequently, *xiao* has suffered the fate of “religion” after the Enlightenment: it has been by and large seen as a tool of oppression and constriction of individual liberty rather than a means to pursue the good.

Historically, one of the most important and illustrative versions of this view is the interpretation of Chinese culture by G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel provides one of his most significant portrayals of China in his *Philosophy of History*. At the heart of this work is Hegel’s conception that history (*Geschichte*) is the theatre in which Absolute Spirit actualizes itself through subjective liberation. Under this rubric, Hegel’s portrait of China is astoundingly unfavorable, clearly in keeping with his Teutonic-centric understanding of *Geschichte*. His presentation of China depicts the imperial system as fundamentally
invariable though appearing in several dynastic forms, and as paternalistic despotism that maintains morality only through external means, especially laws and punishments, acting from without.

Though he is chiefly concerned with political structures, Hegel notes the foundation of these characteristics of Chinese culture in the family. Of the family unit he claims, “On this form of moral union alone rests the Chinese state, and it is objective family piety that characterizes it.” Significantly, “objective” here is a Hegelian pejorative, meaning the lack of subjective identification with the value system. Indeed, for Hegel, the Chinese family admits no subjective qualities at all: “In the family itself they are not personalities, for the consolidated unity in which they exist as members of it is consanguinity and natural obligation.”

In place of the “individual” Hegel says in China there is the family and thus “the element of subjectivity – that is to say, the reflection upon itself of the individual will in antithesis to the substantial… or the recognition of this power as one with its own essential being, in which it knows itself free – is not found on this grade of development.”

For Hegel, the Chinese conception of the family – which is fundamentally bound to the Confucian xiao – was an obstacle to the process of actualization. In addition to being a sign of undeveloped morality and religion, xiao was moreover a cultural device allowing for the suppression of the individual and the subjective. This is a common trope of Western interpretations of xiao, and reveals a rootedness in the anthropological


49 Ibid., 211.
schema of Modernity.\footnote{See, e.g., Walter H. Slote, “Psychocultural Dynamics within the Confucian Family,” in \textit{Confucianism and the Family}, ed. Walter H. Slote and George A. DeVos (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1998), 37-51.} Such critiques presume the radical priority of the individual to the communal, the subjective to the objective, and see authority as fundamentally restrictive rather than affirming. This is especially true of those thinkers influenced by Leftist Hegelians such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Unfortunately, this strain of thought is not limited to the Western hemisphere. As young Chinese men travelled west to study at university in the early 20th century, they gleaned from the West ideas of how to “modernize” China.\footnote{We lack the space here to give the conditions surrounding the intellectual storm preceding the Cultural Revolution. See Chow Tse-tsung, \textit{The May 4th Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).} Though the Chinese program of modernization would be unique and not merely a copy of the \textit{Aufklärung}, the pervasive doctrines of liberalism were well represented in what historian Vera Schwarzc\footnote{Vera Schwarcz, \textit{The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).} has aptly called the “Chinese enlightenment.”\footnote{} Upon the return to China, many of these young intellectuals turned their considerable talents and vim upon the Chinese equivalent of magisterial authority, the Confucian doctrine of \textit{xiao}. As Schwarcz puts it,

...the twentieth-century Chinese enlightenment represents a critical elaboration of its European precedent. Its champions...faced a challenge that was quite different from that of eighteenth-century philosophers who sought to free themselves from the ‘guidance’ of religion. The Chinese intellectuals were battling entrenched habits of self-repression, which were upheld by familial authority rather than theological dictate. Thus, enlightenment in the Chinese context had to mean something other than what it did in Europe during Kant’s lifetime: a program of \textit{disenchantment} that would replace religious superstitions with truths derived from the realm of nature. In twentieth-century China, enlightenment requires a prolonged, still ongoing \textit{disengagement} from the bonds of duty and loyalty that
have kept sons obedient to fathers, wives obedient to husbands, and ministers obedient to rulers for centuries.\textsuperscript{53}

Hence the Chinese “enlightenment,” as with its European precedent, was marked by a fierce struggle against what were perceived as rigid and restrictive structures of authority. For many who desired a modernized China through cultural revolution, the Confucian \textit{xiao} served as a perfect symbol of the intransigent past that must be sacrificed to make way for the new future. Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, an influential journalist, was one of these figures whose approach to \textit{xiao} is illuminating as a form of critique. Chen viewed the doctrine of \textit{xiao} with instincts forged in naturalist philosophy; to him, it represented a feudal (\textit{fengjian} 封建) ethic that was now “old and rotten” and ought to give way to the “process of natural selection.”\textsuperscript{54}

More specifically, Chen argued that \textit{xiao} had left China “too weak and passive to survive in the modern world.”\textsuperscript{55} In the feudal world that was less evolved, this system had served a purpose of holding together a social network. However, in the \textit{modern world}, its prime effect was to produce a Chinese nation unable to resist the impositions of Japan and Western powers. The weakness and subservience that were learned in \textit{xiao}, according to Chen, must be henceforth abandoned. For a sense of how thoroughly \textit{xiao} was seen as problematic to the modernizers of China, we can note that under great pressure from intellectuals in 1905, the Qing court adopted Western style curriculum. Many of these

\begin{footnotes}
\item[53] Ibid., 3.
\item[54] See translation in Tse-tung, 44.
\item[55] Ibid., 302.
\end{footnotes}
new modern-style schools were operated in erstwhile ancestral temples—modernization was understood to supplant the familial structure long-held in Chinese culture.

The most notable contemporary critic of the Confucian xiao has thankfully expanded beyond the authoritarian dynamics of previous scholarship, but still retains the rather materialist foundation of interpretation. Liu Qingping 流清平 has gained notoriety in China and in the US for his argument that Confucianism is based on “consanguinism” (xueqin lunli 血親倫理) or the priority of familial bonds to the exclusion of other social responsibilities. For Liu, the fundamental flaw of Confucianism that makes it unfit or modern life is that it sets the particular blood-relations over-against a general concern for society at large. I will engage Liu throughout chapters 6 and 7 in particular because his arguments are at times intricate and always skillful. Moreover, they have a particular ring of truth – early Confucians did indeed think it was necessary to prioritize family relations over-against other social commitments.

However, where Liu goes wrong in his critique is that he fails to recognize why Confucians argued this way about the family. Liu holds to a strictly materialistic anthropology: social morality is merely about how we treat one another. What he lacks is that which all modern critics of the Confucian xiao lack (outside of Hegel, it seems): the understanding that Confucians saw the family and the state not as a pragmatic network of social responsibilities but as intrinsic ways that human beings pursue and effect

56William T. Rowe, China’s Last Empire: The Great Qing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Belknap, 2009), 260.

57 Guo Qiyong, ed. A Collection of Contention about Confucian Ethics 儒家倫理爭鳴集 (Wuhan: Hubei Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2004); Liu Qingping, “Filiality Versus Sociality and Individuality: On Confucianism as ‘Consanguinism,’” PEW 53 no 2 (April 2003): 234-50. Guo Qiyong’s edited volume contains debates largely centered around Liu’s work. This collection offers several of Liu’s essays and responses from scholars in China. Liu has also published several articles on the theme in the English, the most programmatic being “Filiality Versus Sociality and Individuality.”
flourishing. Put differently, early Confucians believed in the Good, and knew that love within the family was essential to loving others properly and in the right ways – and, we might add, that there are *wrong* ways to love other people and goods. Hence, it has much in common with Augustine’s *ordo amoris* and cannot be reduced to a simple preference of blood-kin over strangers. This is part of the reason I am so invested in speaking of *xiao* as a virtue— it is not simply an emotional disposition, but a part of human flourishing in learning how to love and act toward goods properly.

Another part of the scholarly context of this dissertation are those who marginalize *xiao*. A handful of very important scholars such as Wm. Theodore de Bary, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, and Heiner Roetz each in a different way recognize *xiao* is not simply a method for accruing power, but ultimately see it as rather accidental to the Confucian project. This is especially true in Hall and Ames who, nursing a pragmatist vision of Confucianism buoyed by process philosophy, argue that *xiao* was important to Confucius simply because the family was the context of his thought, not a necessary feature. Thus they argue that although the family is a source of “unquestionable richness,” it is still an institution that could possibly be replaced by “a different, more appropriate, more meaningful communal organization.”

I find this reading absurd on its face, because it undermines a fundamental point of *xiao*, i.e., that the family is intrinsic to human life and human flourishing in a way that is distinct from any other social institution. A more typical and defensible way of marginalizing *xiao*’s importance is found in different degrees in de Bary and Roetz,

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58 See chapter 5.

arguing that the social virtue of ren 仁 is a more central than xiao (de Bary) or that is represents a higher level of morality (Roetz). While it is impossible to deny that ren along with li 禮 are the formal centers of the Confucian vision especially in texts like the Analects, this does not mean that xiao is not of central importance. Rather, I would argue early Confucians refuse to conceive of ren without reference to the familial relationships that define social interaction.

Finally, we can briefly attend to the recent renewal of xiao. In a sense Tu Weiming was ahead of his time, for during the 1980s he was formulating a response to the modernist critics of xiao by calling attention to features that make it difficult to reduce filial piety to obsequiousness. In a profound essay, Tu points out contra xiao’s critics that it involves the son’s “willing participation” in the relationship. Perhaps Tu’s greatest contribution to the recovery of xiao has been an essay clarifying that the Confucian conception of the Five Relationships (of which xiao was a part) was not

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60 W. T. de Bary, “Personal Reflections on Confucian Filial Piety,” in Filial Piety and Future Society, Filial Piety Internation Conference, Korea (1995): 55-76; Heiner Roetz, Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age: A Reconstruction under the Aspect of the Breakthrough toward Postconventional Thinking (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1993). De Bary argues that xiao “is not a major them of the Analects” and that is real importance lies in “its contribution to the central conception of humaneness [ren] as the defining virtue of the noble person [junzi 君子]” (56). Roetz, on the other hand, draws upon Kohlberg’s theory of cognitive develop to argue Confucian ethics involved developing from conventional to postconventional thinking, i.e., the “emancipation of thought from tradition, convention, and institutions.” For him, xiao is part of the conventional stage that is surpassed in the postconventional move to morality (ren); see Roetz, 53-101.

61 Kwong-Loi Shun, “Ren 仁 and Li 禮 in the Analects,” in Confucius and the Analects: New Essays, ed. Bryan W. Van Norden (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 53-72. Shun’s article helpfully illustrates approaches from Chinese scholars towards how ren and li are related in the central text of the Confucian tradition. His own position is that ren and li are akin to mastery of a language and concept – neither is truly directing the other, but they have mutual influence on one another. See also the illuminating response by Li Chenyang who argues li represents a cultural grammar, while being ren represents mastering culture. Li Chenyang, “Li as Cultural Grammar: On the Relation between Li and Ren in Confucius’ Analects,” PEW 57 no 2 (July 2007): 311-29.

hierarchically structured as the Legalist paradigm of the Three Bonds (in which modern critics often read xiao as participating).  

The fruit of this recovery has only recently begun to surface, but it is already a rich harvest. Philosophers like Phillip J. Ivanhoe have recognized xiao is part of the fundamental grammar of Confucian morality, not only as a duty, but as a way of conceiving moral excellence. In a similar vein, Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. have recently published a translation and valuable introduction to the Xiaojing, the Classic of xiao. On a different level, serious and deep engagements with the various understandings of xiao are beginning to appear, the exemplar of this literature being the collection of essays Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History. Since I will cite much of this literature in the dissertation, I will only note for now that my own reading of xiao is heavily indebted to the explorations in this latter volume in particular.

Within this recovery there are some complications my study addresses. First and foremost, in general scholarship has overlooked what I treat in chapter 6 as “indirect care” for parents. In his treatment of the relationship between xiao and ren in Confucianism, for example, Alan K. L. Chan treats xiao as basically limited to the familial sphere, due to a similar move by Zhu Xi. Similarly, a rising tide of philosophical readings of xiao

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64 See Phillip J. Ivanhoe, Confucian Self Cultivation (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000), 2.


drawing upon evolutionary biology see it as functioning within blood relations alone.\textsuperscript{68}

One feature of \textit{xiao} I wish to emphasize (especially by referring to it as a virtue) is that filial piety was for early Confucians a guide to engaging \textit{the world} and not just the family. Or put differently, early Confucians saw that the familial bonds imbued all other forms of social congress so that \textit{every} action is a familial act, especially for Confucians in the late Warring States through the Han periods.

Perhaps the very best and most interesting of the recent approaches to \textit{xiao} is that of A. T. Nuyen.\textsuperscript{69} Nuyen’s work is the most constructive regarding \textit{xiao}, and he attempts to transpose it from a simply familial context to tradition in order to show its relevance for the modern world. Nuyen undertakes this effort by applying a Gadamerian hermeneutic that we understand by growing intellectually within a tradition. In his reading of \textit{xiao} in this way, Nuyen argues the father represents a tradition. In this schema, “the idea of filial piety as obedience to the father can be taken to refer to the necessity to stand within a tradition in the seeking of wisdom and knowledge. Disobedience, in turn, can be taken to refer to the disregard of tradition, or traditional knowledge.”\textsuperscript{70}

This quite clever appropriation of Gadamer leads us to a helpful point from which to identify the contribution of this dissertation. While I appreciate Nuyen’s approach, I think it is unnecessary inasmuch as it attempts to show the “relevance” of \textit{xiao}. I argue \textit{xiao} is quite relevant already; it is simply either misunderstood or seen as repressive by


\textsuperscript{70} Nuyen, “Filial Piety as Respect for Tradition”, 208-209.
those without “eyes to see or ears to hear.” By revisiting the question of what xiao really is, we can effectively push back on modern critiques. Asserting the fullness of xiao as not merely obedience, but rather a deeper, more compelling philosophical account of the filial relationship within which obedience has an important role, we can successfully recuperate the concept’s relevance for modern life. Thus, my reading of xiao as the virtue of filial love that is enacted in filial obedience is meant not only to serve Christian theological reflection, but also to help Nuyen and others “save” xiao from the unfavorable fate it has suffered in modern readings of Confucian thought.

4. Contextualization: Theological Discourse on Christ’s Obedience

4.1. Christ’s Obedience in Tradition and Church History

The Letter to the Hebrews, Paul’s restatement of the Christ hymn of Philippians, and the Father-Son passages of the Fourth Gospel are loci classici for the theme of Christ’s obedience. In addition to selections from Romans 5 and 1 Peter 1, we can also point out that in the Synoptic traditions, Jesus’ identification as the Son of God is intrinsically shaped by obedience. In particular, the scenes where Jesus is proclaimed as the Son of God in the Synoptics – his baptism, Transfiguration, and crucifixion – are imbued with obedience, especially with his baptism and the consequent “in Him I am well pleased.”

The upshot of this is to simply point out that the scriptural attestation of Jesus as Lord and as the Son of God carries an obediential component that is impossible to push to the side. However, how should the New Testament’s witness to Christ as the obedient

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Son of God be interpreted? One example of interpretive strategies can be found in patristic responses to the Monarchist heresies, which focused attention on the obedience of Jesus. Monarchism claimed God was one both in substance and in person; hence if Christ could be genuinely called God made flesh, he was the Father incarnate. Against this position, early churchmen such as St. Hippolytus emphasized the economic and harmonious distinction between the complementary offices of Father and Son, though within God’s oneness. As Hippolytus put it, “The economy of harmony is led back to one God; for God is One. It is the Father who commands, and the Son who obeys, and the Holy Spirit who gives understanding.”

While emphasizing the Son’s obedience in Christ was indeed helpful in exposing the Monarchist error by distinguishing the divine agency in the Incarnation from that of the Father, these early formulations also perhaps allowed room for the most disruptive heresy in ecclesial history. It is no hyperbole that Arius of Alexandria was one of the few thinkers from the early Church who truly emphasized Christ’s obedience as central to his thought. Put charitably, we might even say that Arius attempted to follow the logic of the filial grammar of the Incarnation to its utmost conclusion. In general, this focus led Arius to assert a distinction of dignity between the Father and the Son, ultimately gaining expression in two anathematized theses. The first and most commonly associated with him was his doctrine that the Son was created in time, i.e., the Son is not equal to the Father in divinity, but he is temporally begotten, though as head of all creation.

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The second and often overlooked thesis was that because the Son was begotten in time, he was thus mutable, and capable of both virtue and vice. St. Alexander of Alexandria gives this thesis especial emphasis, since it intensifies the adoptionist structure of the Arian position. According to Alexander, Arius held that God “foresaw” that the Son “would not rebel against Him” and for that reason “chose him from all.” Alexander goes on to add that Arius taught that God chose the Son not because he was different in nature from other sons, but rather “on account of the carefulness of His manners and His practice, which in no way turned to that which is evil.”

Arius, then, admits the dignity of Christ primarily in terms of his filial obedience, but by this he means two fundamental things. First, that the Son’s generation from the Father is structured in the same way the generation of human sons from human fathers: there is a temporal posterior, and not simply an essential ex implicit in the relationship itself. Second, that the filial obedience of Jesus is exceptional or unique in measure, but not in kind. To Arius, Christ’s perfect filial obedience is the ground of his election, and is in keeping with his creaturely ontology.

The orthodox response to Arianism at Nicaea would take two courses. On the one hand there would arise the creedal codification of the equality of the Father and Son in the Godhead on the basis of the unity of the divine substance. On the other, this affirmation is buoyed by language meant to specifically draw hard and fast distinctions between the Triune paternity and filiation, and the human relation evoked in the revealed analog. Lewis Ayres, in his discussion of the debate concerning homoiousios and homoousios reveals the crux of the issue. The Homoiousions were concerned because the

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74 Ibid.
term *homoousios* had been used by Gnostics to describe “products of acts of creation in which semi-divine beings are made out of pre-existing (semi-material) substances.”\(^75\) Thus the term seemed to denote materialism and impute this to God, precisely in such wise as to predicate that the divine mode of generation was imbued with some kind of material or temporal distance as exists in human generation.\(^76\) It was only under the specific clarification that the analogy only applied to the *fact* of generation, rather than its mode, that the church came to agreement about the resultant dogma of Nicaea.\(^77\)

Hence, after Nicaea, the orthodox response to the Arian misreading of obedience was by-and-large focused on the Father-Son terminology in respect to Trinitarian generation, i.e., God’s existing as both Unbegotten and Begotten within the one divine substance. Because this distinction was one of generation and not dignity, it showed the predication of a father-son relationship within God was profoundly dissimilar to the relation in the purely human mode. Consequently, I would argue the category of filial obedience could not clearly assist in clarifying this distinction, and for that reason (principally, yet among others) it was not developed as a central formula.

I do not wish to imply, however, that the Church Fathers and Mothers were unconcerned with Christ’s obedience or its connection to the Triune life. Christ’s obedience and the Son’s condescension were constitutive features of Patristic soteriology.\(^78\) However, the philosophical category of filial obedience was not a popular theological hermeneutic, and was laid aside for other important developments. In the


\(^{76}\) Ibid., 95.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 142.

\(^{78}\) Ransom atonement depends upon this structure indeed.
Latin Church, one of the major reasons for not appropriating filial obedience as a primary Christological category was due to the psychological trajectory St. Augustine established in *De Trinitate*. St. Augustine’s attempt in deploying his famed psychological analogy was to describe a type of generation of distinction in God while maintaining the generation is not externalized, i.e. ontologically distinct rather than personally.\(^{79}\) Within this analogy, the Trinitarian title of *Verbum* served much better than *Filius* in clarifying this aspect of generation. Augustine’s Trinitarian approach would, of course, set the stage for much of Latin history, which helps to account for the lack of emphasis on Christ’s filial obedience in the Scholastic period.

We can also mention that the major philosophical resources for the early Church fathers such as Augustine give no compelling reason to emphasize filial obedience as a category. While the father-son relation was important to Plato, as the *Euthyphro* shows, it is by no means a central concern of the school.\(^{80}\) In fact the mythological substructure lying behind Greek philosophy – e.g., Zeus and the Olympians go to war against their fathers – was not a fertile ground for considering the father-son relationship as one of intrinsic love and devotion, but often of animosity. Similarly, the *Enneads* show little emphasis on understanding the father-son relation. Aristotle, for his part did develop the special category of domestic justice and attended to the father-son relation within it.\(^{81}\) However, once again, this was not an overwhelming point of concern for Aristotle, nor can it be called central to his thought.

\(^{79}\) *De Trinitate*, Book X.


The Scholastic turn to Aristotle worked alongside the inheritance of the Augustinian analogy of the Triune persons. This does not mean that Scholastic thinkers ignored either Christ’s obedience or his filial identity in the Trinity, just as Augustine had not ignored these themes. It simply means that considering the filial contours of Christ’s obedience was not a primary point of concern in this period, at least not so stated. St. Thomas comes near the question when he addresses the missions within the Godhead.\textsuperscript{82} But here, Thomas displays a traditional emphasis on the \textit{disanalogy} of the Father-Son relationship within God: the notion of “mission” in human experience requires command or counsel, but this form does not obtain in God. Moreover, when Thomas treats of Christ’s obedience, he focuses on the perfection of Christ’s human nature in subjection to the Father and the \textit{Logos}.\textsuperscript{83} Given Thomas’s understanding of the \textit{communicatio idiomatum}, it is possible to see this in terms of filial obedience, but this is not a move Thomas himself makes. In neither case does Thomas emphasize or even deploy filial obedience as an intellectual category.

At this juncture, it is important to note that I do not think the neglect of filial obedience is a dire mistake of earlier thinkers, nor is my emphasis on it a salve of correction. Rather, I wish to have shown the tradition had \textit{exceptionally} good reasons for not developing Christology in this direction. Quite simply, the category of filial obedience does not seem to me apt for the determinative tasks that were needed throughout the early Church. Another way of seeing this is that an account of Christ’s filial obedience such as the one this dissertation develops, actually \textit{requires and is dependent upon} the Christological structure established through the early councils and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{82} ST IIIa q. 43.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{83} ST IIIa q. 20; cf. ST IIIa q. 7 a. 3 ad obj. 2}
the Scholastic period. Specifically, Chalcedon’s formulation of the Hypostatic Union, along with the Scholastic clarifications on the personal union – both of which instruct us in the dissimilarity between the predicates of divine and human filiation – enable a robust theology of Christ’s filial obedience to emerge.

According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, the figure who did constitute a genuine advance in the understanding of Christ’s filial obedience was St. Ignatius of Loyola. Since I discuss this more in depth in Chapter 2, I will simply here say that Ignatius’ vision of election, mission, and vocation revolved around the imitation of Christ, and hence required an articulation of Christ’s obedience. In this sense, Christ’s filial obedience can be seen as located at the intersection between Christology and ecclesiology, adding to the relation between Christology and soteriology. Soteriology informs us of the necessity that Christ was obedient unto death, even death on a cross. But ecclesiology informs us of the necessity that Christ somehow models obedience for us and enables obedience in the Church, neither of which are solely attributable to his human nature. Thus what Ignatius accomplished was to place Christ’s obedience in the context of the question of how God engages the world in the concrete foundation of the Church.

4.2. Contemporary Approaches to Christ’s Obedience

Recent trends in both Catholic and Evangelical American theologies have shown a somewhat remarkable interest in the question of Christ’s obedience, particularly in light of the historical reticence on the theme in the tradition. There seem two reasons for this interest. On the one hand, because Christ’s obedience is central in Balthasar’s theology as well as that of Karl Barth, the theme has seen treatments by scholars of their work. Another, perhaps more interesting and provocative reason is provided in the thought of
Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware, *inter al.*, who argue for a Trinitarian theology of authoritarianism in order to ground their understanding of authority in the family. As with the historical survey, my goal here is not to exhaust the issue, but merely show what is at stake in the question of Christ’s obedience. My conclusion is that God’s perfections are the crux of the issue, at least for the modern approach to the topic.

Before one can understand the recent discourse on Christ’s obedience, however, it is necessary to understand the Modern background, most accessible in the kenotic theology of Gottfried Thomasius.\(^{84}\) According to Claude F. Welch, Thomasius’ emphasis on kenosis has two roots. Of more immediate concern were the attacks on ecclesial Christology by D.F. Strauss and F.C. Baur, to which Thomasius sought to respond by deepening the traditional Lutheran account of the *communicatio idiomatum*. The second root is this interpretation, which asserted the human and divine natures of Christ “were not only joined…they were also actually imparted to each other.”\(^{85}\)

In his *Dogmatik*, Thomasius builds his approach to kenosis by first commenting on the immanent Trinitarian structure that makes such kenosis possible. He argues only the Son could aptly become Incarnate because his “hypostatic status” is “to will devotedly the will of the Father.” Hence, the “trinitarian status” of the Son “destines” him for the Incarnation. In this sense, Thomasius begins a formulation that the filial hypostasis within Godhead involves the possibility for a particular obedience, i.e., to will as the Father wills and to condescend to save the human race. However, it is striking that


\(^{85}\) Claude Welch, *God and Incarnation in Mid-Nineteenth Century German Theology* (New York: Oxford, 1965), 27.
Thomasius abandons the filial structure of the question in favor of divine and human perfections.

For Thomasius, the essential problem of the Incarnation is that God cannot be united and “impart himself” to human nature in his utter perfection (particularly the economically impactful perfections: omnipotence, etc.). For in this case the divine nature would surpass the human “as a broader circle does a smaller one.” Concomitantly human nature cannot be lifted into perfection that would result from being imparted “the unlimited fullness of his divine lordship” since that would render the Son of God unable to be in solidarity with the sinful state of human being. Hence, Thomasius concludes the Incarnation must involve the “self-limitation” of the Son of God, wherein the Son “divests himself of the divine mode of being in favor of the humanly creaturely form of existence.” Or, as he also puts it, the Incarnation requires a “renunciation of the divine glory” on the part of the Son.

There is a certain irony in Thomasius’ conclusion. Earlier in his work he argues the conciliar Christologies, e.g. that of Leo the Great, are deficient because they feature a “dualism” between God and human nature. Yet the fact of sin is so great for Thomasius that God’s perfections toward the world – indeed, even the human perfections that arise in communion with God – are impossible to predicate in the Incarnation. I call this ironic

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86 Thomasius in Welch, 46.
87 Ibid., 47.
88 Ibid., 48. Thomasius distinguishes between the “essential” aspects of the divine nature and the divine mode of being in light of the economy.
89 Ibid., 48. This formulation encapsulates what Balthasar finds so lamentable about 19th century kenoticism. Against this, he will state, drawing upon P. Althaus, that “the paradox must be allowed to stand: in the undiminished humanity of Jesus, the whole power and glory of God are made present to us” (MP, 33). For more responses to kenotic theology from Balthasar, see MP, 31-34 and TD5, 223.
because what might bolster the existentially dualistic formulation of Thomasius is precisely the Scholastic axiom paired with the “dualistic” conciliar conception of the divine and human natures: \textit{gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit.}

This insight is important because in the end Thomasius – and we might generalize from him kenotic theology at large – tends to see the filial character of the Son as a means to kenosis. It enables the obedience entailed in God’s willingness to limit divine perfections for the sake of the Incarnation. If we may for a moment anticipate the argument of the dissertation, we can add here that precisely what Balthasar wishes to do, \textit{contra} Thomasius \textit{et al.}, is to consider the filial character of the Son \textit{qua} divine perfection. Whereas the emphasis on filial obedience leads toward a theology of divine passibility, or at least mutability in kenotic theology, Balthasar and Barth approach Christ’s filial love and obedience within a movement of contemplating the \textit{perfections} of God that presume the possibility of the Incarnation.

In the cultural context of German Modernity, both Balthasar and Barth take up the challenge of kenotic theology in their own theories of Christ’s obedience. Their general concern is to argue that Christ’s kenotic obedience comes out of the perfections of the Triune life rather than function as a renunciation of these perfections. Thus, the question of Christ’s obedience has to do with God’s perfections, but precisely as these relate to the order and structure of creation. As one would expect, this approach requires revisiting the traditional conceptions of divine perfections, such as immutability and impassibility.\(^9\)

While neither Balthasar nor Barth wishes to simply do away with these doctrines, they also restructure them to allow for an expression that God has in himself kenotic

perfections, specifically in positing the notion of a primordial obedience within God’s very life.

Against this backdrop, one can clearly see why American Thomists in particular have entered the conversation of Christ’s obedience. Both Thomas Joseph White and Guy Mansini have authored important essays that push back on Barth and Balthasar respectively. The root of the issue is twofold. On the one hand, the notion of obedience within God’s Triune life calls into doubt the simplicity of the divine will, and the equal dignity of the divine persons. Moreover, following St. Thomas, the Incarnation concerns both divine and human perfections where the human nature of Jesus is perfected in its intellectual and volitional capacities through the hypostatic union. Hence, there is an important recognition of Christ’s perfect human obedience in the economy, and we must be wary of confusing these perfections with the divine perfections to which they are united.

Of the perfections in God that are at risk in the portraits of Balthasar and Barth the most important regards the divine will. As Fr. White puts the problem,

…the positing of [intra-Trinitarian] obedience in God renders obscure the confession of the unity of the divine will and power of God. Consequently, it would also make problematic the affirmation of a divine immutable omnipotence present in the incarnate Son…There is an inevitable discord between the affirmation that the eternal, wise, and omnipotent God became human, and the affirmation that there is obedience within the very

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92 *ST* IIIa, qq. 9-13

life of God that characterizes the person of the Son as distinct from the Father.\(^{94}\)

The complication is that if the unity of the divine will is surrendered by an obediential conception of the Triune life, the mystery of the Incarnation is also threatened – we quite simply risk Arianism or Tritheism.

Recognizing this issue, Michael Waldstein has offered perhaps the best American defense of the Balthasar and Barth’s line of thought. Waldstein’s central contribution is to argue, “It is not true that what is needed for obedience is two wills…What is needed for obedience is a distinction of persons and, on the one hand, a command, and on the other, consent.”\(^{95}\) I address this particular claim as regards Balthasar’s theology in chapter 8, but for now we should simply point out that Waldstein is attempting to maintain the affirmation of immanent Trinitarian obedience without falling into a denial of the simplicity of the divine will. Mansini’s recent rejoinder to Waldstein at the least proves this topic is both thorny and central to assessing Balthasar’s place in Catholic thought (let alone doctrine).

With evangelical theologians such as Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware, the discourse surrounding Christ’s obedience is starkly illuminating in their treatment of the divine perfections. In his *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, Ware nicely summarizes the thrust of the argument on two claims. First, there is the proposition that

an authority-submission structure marks the very nature of the eternal Being of the one who is three. In this authority-submission structure, the three Persons understand the rightful place each has. The Father possesses

\(^{94}\) White, 378.

the place of supreme authority, and the Son is eternal Son of the eternal Father. As such, the Son submits to the Father just as the Father, as eternal Father of the eternal Son, exercises authority over the Son.  

The second proposition is that “the doctrine of the Trinity is eminently practical” to the degree that it serves as a “pattern for how human life and human relationships are to be conducted.”

According to Kevin Giles, the second proposition shapes the first, spurred on by cultural debates in the modern West surrounding the complementarity of men and women. He argues that the positions taken by Ware, et al. are used justify a strong patriarchal conception of the family, turning to the eternal Son’s life in the Trinity to provide a model for biblical womanhood responding to the Father’s eternal priority. While this certainly seems to be the case, the fact that the Trinity is used in this way is not itself revealing of what goes so terribly wrong in these positions.

First and foremost, there is a considerable inequality between the analogy of the father-son relationship and that of husband-wife in terms of authority. In his engagement with the arguments of Evangelical Feminism, Wayne Grudem points out that some theologians have argued against Grudem’s preferred complementarianism on the grounds that there are legitimate and illegitimate models of authority, the former made legitimate because they are based on unequal ability or free choice rather than ontology.

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96 Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles & Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 21.

97 Ibid., 22.


is right to assert that equality in being can involve distinction in roles, however, what he
fails to grasp is that authority-subordination is not a one-size fits all. Early Confucians
like Mencius understood this, and hence spoke of the wu-lun 五倫 or five relationships
that ground human life, each of which must be negotiated in its particularity.

This differentiation is vital because any authority in the husband-wife relation is
not identical to an authoritarian structure in a father-son relationship. Primarily this is
because the latter is based on a mode of generation, precisely as it takes place in time –
the father precedes his son in being, in age, and in wisdom, and on these grounds he has
authority over his son. Even if such an authority structure existed within God’s immanent
life, which I contend it does not, this would still not lend any clarity to the husband-wife
relationship as such. The father-son relation is not the husband-wife relation, and the
authority functioning within each is unique to the relational form; mixing the
authoritarian structures not only is a misappropriation, it dismisses the significance of
these distinct human relationships. Moreover, the practical application that Grudem and
Ware attempt with the thesis of eternal subordination in God smacks of a rank abuse of
the analogical construct. Quite simply their use suggests that the relations within God’s
life can be better understood than human relations, and thus the Trinity sheds light on the
mystery of human life – but this is precisely the opposite of how analogy works.

Another issue of importance in light of the foregoing study is the theory of
revelation lying behind this approach to eternal subordination. Grudem and his
compatriots freely admit that this conception of subordination within God is discovered
from the economy. Within this, however, they quickly lose sight of the doctrine of
appropriation, considering creation, for example, as the work of the Father mediated
through the Son without qualifying this as an act of God in Triune simplicity.¹⁰⁰ In Grudem’s specific formulation, this gets intensified:

…if we do not have economic subordination, then *there is no inherent difference in the way the three persons relate to one another*, and consequently *we do not have the three distinct persons existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity.* For example, if the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally ‘Father’ and the Son is not eternally ‘Son.’ This would mean that the Trinity has not eternally existed.¹⁰¹

The theological complications here are vast, but there are two in particular that are important to avoid when discussing the Christ’s obedience. First and foremost, it is obvious that we cannot know how the persons of the Trinity are distinct except through the economy. However, it is a grave mistake to think that the economy constitutes the inherent difference in God. What Grudem has suggested is that God needs the economic order so that the persons may be distinct, so that without *economic* subordination, God is a monad. Hence, the root issue here is that Grudem has not rightly understood the relationship between the immanent and economic Trinity. Whatever we may say of Christ’s obedience, we have to understand that the mode of the Incarnation is not a necessity of God (which Balthasar helpfully shows), but it is rather the free act of God *ad extra.* There are eternal distinctions within God that ground the intelligibility of the economic, not the reverse. The challenge for theologians like Balthasar is how does one describe the nature of the immanent distinctions in God’s eternal life that ground and make sense of the obedience shown in the Incarnation?

¹⁰⁰ See Ware, 51-63.

But even if we grant Grudem has merely used poor phrasing and does not intend to render the economy as necessary to God, there is the problem that he assigns the eternal Fatherhood an authoritarian reality. Within the immanent Triune life, the Church has always spoken of the Father-Son relation as one of generation, i.e., the distinction between the Unbegotten and Begotten Persons in God. The distinctness of the Persons is primarily understood in these terms, and has never been described in terms of subordination in the orthodox tradition. Economically, in fact, I argue in chapter 8 that the obedience of the Son is predicated because of the Incarnation, which makes this predication possible. However there is a profound difference between filial obedience and subordination, particularly as early Confucians understood the concept. My argument is that early Confucianism allows for a conception of the Triune relations primarily as love that is then fittingly expressed in the economic idiom of filial obedience. Because the economic form of Christ’s obedience is grounded in love rather than authority, it rules out the subordinationist grammar that Grudem and Ware evoke, though it raises other complications that must be negotiated.

To summarize what is pertinent from the historical and contemporary discourse on Christ’s obedience, we can offer the following principles that will guide our interpretation as we turn to the major arguments and themes of the dissertation:

(1) The theologoumenon of Christ’s obedience has direct effect on our understanding of the divine perfections and the relation of God’s perfections to the world;

(2) One primary perfection that is at risk in the study of Christ’s obedience is the assertion of volitional complexity in God;

(3) Guarding against this improper predication regarding God’s life requires a clear and firm distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity;
(4) Yet this distinction ought not be dialectical, so that God’s perfections must be renounced in the Incarnation – we must recognize a harmonious continuity between the immanent Trinitarian relations and distinctions, and the economic distinctions;

(5) The concept of obedience must be distinguished as a particular species applicable to the Father-Son relation, with attention to the immanent-economic distinction, and not grounded in difference but in the union of the divine substance.
CHAPTER 1

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY: SKETCHING AN INCORPORATIONAL APPROACH

“For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field, that is, in this world...”
~ St. Irenaeus of Lyons (AH, IV.26.1)

1. Introduction

A principal question for this project concerns the possibility of a cross-cultural philosophical application within Christian theology. The problem has two thrusts of justifiable concern of authenticity: 1) can an explicitly Christian application of non-Christian thought provide an authentic reading of such a tradition, and 2) can the application of a non-Christian intellectual tradition produce a genuinely Christian theology? These are both, of course, perennial questions of comparative theology in general, and cannot hope to be exhausted here – as this work is not a justification of comparative theology as such, but rather assumes its legitimacy, I do not aim to provide a thoroughgoing apologia. However, since this work deals with a tradition that blurs the distinction between “religion” and “philosophy,” we must address these concerns specifically as regards Confucianism in order to be conversant with scholarly discourses on this tradition that do not assume either a theological conviction or approach.

This chapter addresses the intellectual disposition or model underlying the dissertation. It is not a chapter on method per se, but it rather delineates how I understand
the task of comparative theology in incorporating Confucian philosophy into Christian theology. As stated in the introduction to the dissertation, I have been introduced into the world of Chinese Christianity (specifically Catholicism) through marriage and fatherhood; my scholarship flows out of a very real attempt to embody Chinese-culture and Catholicism in my home with my wife and children. Consequently, I am not interested in setting out a method that directs an analysis so that the results can be anticipated from the start. I am more invested in describing the sorts of “intellectual virtues” that will aid the theologian who wishes to do justice to the Chinese culture and resources, and maintain fidelity with the Catholic tradition and dogma.

My contention is that comparative theology is best practiced as “incorporation.” This concept is primarily theological, in its purest form referring to the participation of Christians in the *corpus mysticum Christi*, and is fitting for at least three main reasons. First, because as in St. Paul’s first great discourse on the *corpus Christi* in 1 Cor. 12:12-27, it allows the intellectual distinctiveness of Chinese philosophy to be honored and reverenced in comparative theology. Second, because “incorporation” retains the sense that at its foundations, comparative theology is not merely an intellectual exercise, but is

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1 Cf. John Berthrong, *All Things Under Heaven*; Robert Cummings Neville, *Ritual and Deference: Extending Chinese Philosophy in a Comparative Context* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2008); Neville, *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2000). The key distinguishing feature of this dissertation in comparative theology surrounds, it seems, my commitment to incorporating Confucian philosophy explicitly into a theological reflection that holds tightly upon the Christian tradition, especially as passed down in the conciliar Christologies. Scholars John Berthrong and Robert C. Neville, both of Boston University, have been key thinkers who attempt to draw upon Confucian insights for Christian theology, but neither shows a deep, formalized commitment to orthodox doctrine; rather, these scholars traverse the intersection of Confucian thought and Christian theology along the lines of Neo-classical philosophy and American pragmatism, respectively. I do not mean that Berthrong and Neville are for this reason heretical, but only that they show preference for more modern, peripherally Christian theological models as part of the liberal Protestant tradition.

2 I borrow this phrase as from Lee H. Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1990), though in a broad sense, rather than the discipline-centered conception he has.
moreover a working out of the unity of truth as part of the *mysterii fidei*. Third, the language of incorporation refers the means of such study to the ultimate source of Truth itself, Jesus Christ, who is the Head and principle of union.

The remainder of the chapter lays out a vision of incorporation by using two images, one experiential and the other intellectual. First, I describe incorporation in terms of matrimony, emphasizing that comparative theology concerns unity within difference and difference within unity, and that exchange between partners is to be understood as gift. The second and largest section of the chapter argues for incorporation based on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s understanding of Christ as the *Gestalt* of Truth. For Balthasar, although theology and philosophy are distinct, all truths that can be philosophically discovered nevertheless participate in the wholeness of Truth, Jesus Christ. To play off the title of D.C. Schindler’s recent book, for Balthasar reason is “catholic”: Christ is the universal Truth in which all truths participate.³

Undoubtedly, readers might expect a lengthy discussion on questions of inculturation, translation⁴, and incommensurability, which are necessarily negotiated in

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⁴ The problem of translation concerns the possibility of a genuine rendering of terms from language A into language B. In Anglo-American analytic philosophy, this question has played an important role in epistemology, such as in the work of W. V. N. Quine (e.g., *Word and Object* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960]). Importantly, the debate on language and translation typically resort to hypotheticals, e.g. Quine’s encounter with a previously unknown people who speak a previously unknown language. Hence, the problems that arise in the philosophical consideration of translation are not as exigent in the *practice* of translation, which is aided by historical predecessors who hone the art. Sinologists, for example, have traditionally had fierce arguments about *how* to translate Chinese terms and concepts, but have always assumed it possible (though in the case of Peter A. Boodberg, chiefly through the use of awkward neologisms). For examples of these debates, see Derk Bodde, “On Translating Chinese Philosophical Terms,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 14 (Feb 1955): 231-44, reprinted in Bodde, *Essays on Chinese Civilization*, ed. Charles le Blanc and Dorothy Borel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981): 395-408; see also Boodberg, “On the Semasiology of some Primary Confucian Concepts,”

Moreover, we can note the work of analytic philosophers such as Donald Davidson, who finds it implausible to consider the possibility of identifying something as a *language* without being able to have any means to translate it (see Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” in *Inquiries into Truth*
the literature of comparative philosophy or religion. These concerns are vast and legitimate, centering on articulating whether and how it is even possible for a scholar from one context to understand, interpret, and represent the intellectual product of another. However, I resign whatever discussion of these topics is necessary to footnotes, since to focus on them will make the project something else indeed. The comparative philosopher will be challenged by questions of incommensurability or language because they are intrinsically philosophical and epistemological, and require a thorough philosophy of language for resolution. The theologian will do well to be cognizant of these considerations, but cannot be crippled by them, since her task is to speak of the mysteries of God and his economy. Of course, this does not mean the comparative theologian cannot discuss these concerns, only that to do so would be to develop a theology of language, epistemology, and even a theological semiotics, none of which is our ultimate goal here. Thus, like the historian or sinologist, the Anglo-American Catholic theologian can assume it is possible to understand, interpret, and represent

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5 By semiotics I mean two things: first, understanding better the role of symbols in intercultural dialogue. Second, I mean to point out a semiotic challenge at the heart of faith. Today it is often forgotten that for centuries the creedral statements attributed to the Apostles, Nicæa, and Constantinople were known not merely as “creeds” but as *symbolorum*. Due to the subjective turn, it is tempting to see this as a conception of external words that symbolize an internal intellectual or volitional act, which is not without its merit. However, texts such as Cyril of Alexandria’s letter to Nestorius complicate this: citing Hebrews 3:1, Cyril argues that Christ confesses our faith to God as we confess it to him. Hence, the creedral statements stand as a symbol of that confession Jesus makes for us – it is a form of participation in the thing signified. Because of this aspect of faith, we cannot simply “translate” signs from one culture to another for reasons of cultural relevance to the people, though this is a just concern. We must also give deep consideration to the relationship between *res* and *signum* that exists in the profession and act of faith, married with a concern for relevance and a maximal approach to cultural appropriation.
classical Chinese Confucianism without having to provide an explicit account of how this is so in epistemological terms.\(^6\)

2. **Changing the Conversation: Towards Incorporation**

At the present, the vast majority of treatments of Confucianism and Christianity or Confucianism and Christian figures have been approached through the lens of comparative religion, philosophy, or ethics. Although I consider the method I adopt here as part of the spectrum of comparative theology, I argue the typical negotiation of Confucianism and Christianity in these other comparative models is theologically limiting. This is to say the comparative theology one finds in authors such as James L. Fredericks and Francis X. Clooney, SJ is a very different and more theologically helpful type of interreligious engagement that is intrinsically integrative, even incorporational, and hence my criticism of comparative methodology is not aimed at this literature.\(^7\) In contrast, the disciplinary perspectives of comparative religion and philosophy tend to adopt methods that by their nature make difficult the task of allowing the content of one intellectual tradition to be incorporated into the intellectual structure of another. But for

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\(^7\) James Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christianity and the Other Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999); Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu Wisdom for All God’s Children* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998). It is important to note that comparative theology is appreciably distinct from comparative religious studies or comparative philosophy, precisely because it involves bringing the fruit of discourse into the Church for its edification. While this notion is challenged by some comparative theologians, both Fredericks and Clooney model this sort of engagement. In particular, my own project is very sympathetic with Clooney’s work, though I would say appropriating Hindu principles is in many ways more challenging (and hence risky for orthodox reflection) because of the clearly developed conceptions of the divine and revealed texts in that tradition. The upshot of this is that the criticisms I make here of comparative method do not extend to comparative theology as such, but only when the comparative theologian moves toward the limitations I lay out in this section. Those interested in a theological conversation regarding the role of comparative theology in Catholic theology, see *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24 no 1 (2014).
the early Church and medieval Scholastics, such integration was a matter of course, as St. Thomas’ grand *oeuvre* testifies.

The contemporary American academic context, which is largely post-Christian, post-colonial, and post-modern, emphasizes the otherness and autonomy of various religious traditions. Thus, studies resembling St. Augustine’s recovery of the *spolia Aegyptorum* are often deemed unfit for the modern context as these necessarily privilege the truth claims of Christianity over and against another tradition.\(^8\) The problem is enhanced by the modern conception of “religion” ensconced in humanities disciplines: because all religions are types of a token, privileging truth claims of one’s own faith amounts to epistemic arrogance.\(^9\) In short, the contemporary academic context by-and-large determines from the outset that there can be no “winner” among competing religious claims. Hence, comparative methods ostensibly allow for a way to negotiate this new academic context, and to benefit Christianity by allowing it a better understanding of itself and other traditions, but falling short of integrating these insights into Christian life and consciousness.

There is, then, an important theological principle left behind in this turn to the comparative method. When St. Justin Martyr thought of Plato as a “Christian before Christ,” this was not simply due to his estimation of Platonism.\(^{10}\) Rather, it was because

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\(^8\) St. Augustine deploys this imagery most famously in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, in order to argue why it is fitting for Christians to use the principles and examples of pagan rhetoric and philosophy in clarifying the teaching of the Church. Importantly, as a friend reminded me in private conversation, the imagery harkens back to Exodus 12 and is not an image of privileged conquest, but of gathering “provisions for the journey.” It is vital to recover this sense in the face of post-colonial criticism, in order to show how Christian theological appropriation is not exploitative, but ultimately eschatological, i.e. ordered toward the kingdom and the knowledge of God.


\(^{10}\) This language appears in St. Justin Martyr’s *Second Apology*, 8.
he understood Christ as the *spermatikos logos*, the seed-bearing Word who sowed the seeds of truth in the cosmos and order of existence. According to St. Justin, the truth of Christ is universal and all truth is genuinely his. Similarly, it is important for Christian theology to recognize that this same *Logos* has planted the “roots of the *Dao*” (*ben dao* 本道) in China. In light of this recognition, Christian theology stands under the Pauline exhortation to “take all thoughts captive unto Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5), and therefore to call Chinese philosophy into the service of the truth in Christ, and not merely set in contrast with this proclamation. Consequently, this necessity means that the conversation about Christianity and Confucianism founded in comparative religion, philosophy, and ethics has a limited usefulness for Christian theology, and we must press on to consider incorporational modes of thought.

The model of comparative studies is to place two disparate traditions in dialogue with one another. In this sense, the scholar understands herself immediately as a facilitator of dialogue and exchange. Yet all importance lies on the fact that often in comparisons of Confucianism and Christianity, the dialogue is seen as an end unto itself. Xinzhong Yao, in his exceptionally important study of the Confucian *ren* 仁 and Christian *agape* exemplifies this principle altruistically: “To create peace and harmony in the world, we have to reduce hostility and misunderstanding between different traditions. To reduce hostility, and misunderstanding, we have to initiate dialogue between different faiths. To initiate dialogue, we have to undertake comparative studies of the theories and
practices of different religions, so that this dialogue may be meaningful and productive."

Such ends, popular among scholars of religion, are no doubt admirable, but also theologically constricting. The notion of a “dialogue” that transcends various traditions and encompasses them is a very different kind of catholicity than Christianity, for instance, claims for itself. Consequently, the dialogical model sets a priori limits on the conversation that will take place. The importance of this is that theologically, any claim can quickly become understood as merely the expression of one intellectual or religious program.

However, when the Church proclaims that Jesus is Lord, it does not understand the claim as a “Christian” one, as though it is a simply product of Christian categories. It is rather the revealed truth that Christians uniquely profess. Comparative dialogue as it is popularly understood cannot truly account for the nature of this claim, for it will necessarily circumscribe “Jesus as Lord” as part of Christian language and expression – the claim certainly is this, but it is also more. The dialogue has no means of either adjudicating this claim or, more importantly, entering into this mystery. As such, a Christian may well participate in the dialogue, but the dialogue itself is still peripheral to fundamental practices and doctrines of Christian identity.

A stark example of this is Yanxia Zhao’s recent study, *Father and Son in Confucianism and Christianity*. Zhao, like Yao above, begins with altruistic ends: one ought to study the father and son relationship in both Confucianism and Christianity so as

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to create better understanding, and thus reduce conflict. But his presentation has severe problems that would raise the question of whether the Christian position is actually conversant in this process. In comparing the father-son relation, Zhao describes the Confucian approach as “a typical secular pattern” while the Christian is “a typical divine pattern.” Zhao perceives, then, a fundamental symmetry between Confucianism and Christianity in that “although Confucian teaching was formed on the natural [Father-Son] relationship, and Christian doctrine on the spiritual, both are family oriented and [Father-son] relationship centered, as well as having a similar tendency to take the central relationship as a model and transfer its function to other familial, social, and political extensions, thereby enabling the [Father-son] value-model to permeate the whole of society.”

In this presentation, the Christian notices several aspects that conflict with orthodox Trinitarian theology. First and foremost, what does Zhao mean when calling the divine Father-Son relation in Christianity “typical”? There seem two options. Perhaps Zhao means, in the spirit of his general thesis, that the divine Father-Son relation becomes the ground and measure for all Christian life, and thus becomes “typical.” Or, perhaps he means there is a generic form of conceptions of divine paternity and filiation, of which Christianity represents one species. Either way, the language is disconcerting. In light of the first view, the Christian understanding of the Father-Son relation as “typical”


_13_ Ibid., 1. Emphasis original.

_14_ Ibid., 3.
for Christian life would require *massive* qualification.\(^\text{15}\) In light of the second, we can point to similar concerns with the ease with which Zhao sees the human Confucian relationship as a 1:1 comparative partner with the divine Trinitarian relations. In this way, Zhao seems to consider the Triune relations as one “divine” instance of the genus of father-son relations.

But for the Christian, the terminology of Father and Son is itself analogical, i.e., it is already based upon a similarity between the divine life and the human father-son relation, *but within a greater dissimilitude*. As we saw in the introduction, Lewis Ayres has shown how contentious the debate was surrounding the language of *homoousios* (i.e., that the Son is “of the same essence of the Father”). According to Ayres, the problem in the eyes of the *Homoiousions* (those who defended the use of “similar essence”) was that *homoousios* too strongly resembled the manner of human generation between father and son.\(^\text{16}\) Hence, the application of *homoousios* is only supported under the proviso that the Triune names of Father and Son are *analogical to, but distinct from* the forms of human relations. The thrust of this is that according to Christian doctrine, the father-son relation is an analogy upon which to understand the divine-human relations, but we cannot understand the divine life as being one type of father-son relation. The Father, Son, and their relation can be illuminated by understanding the human relationship, but cannot be strictly set side-by-side as two different interpretations of the paternity and filiation.

This form of dialogical model, then, forces the Christian to treat the Trinity as one set of relations that can be put alongside human relationships. For the theologian, this

\(^{15}\) See discussion of Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware in section 4.2 of introduction to the dissertation.

\(^{16}\) Ayres, 95.
implies a puzzling and dangerous horizontality between God and humanity. Instead, the theologian will seek to emphasize the verticality of analogy. In this, the Confucian conception of father and son proves fruitful indeed for clarifying the human relationship, as my analysis shows below, but precisely as a resource for clarifying the vertical movement of theology, i.e., incorporating these insights into the drama of Christian doctrine and worship. All this shows that in a desire to establish a dialogue that transcends Christianity and Confucianism, Zhao’s study actually makes impossible the way that Christian theology makes use of the natural course of the father-son relation. In this dialogue of peace, the Christian position is not allowed to be what the claim truly is.

Such results, however, are also found in dialogues with a more disciplinary scope. Lee H. Yearley wrote *Mencius and Aquinas* as an exploration of the virtues, especially courage. Yearley notes that examining the theories of Mencius and Aquinas helps serve several ends. Broadly, the comparison allows one to better see the distinct approaches of each thinker. More particularly, the comparison can help to lead to the cultivation of “new intellectual virtues” that serve the discipline of ethical philosophy.\(^{17}\) In this, Yearley’s comparison resonates with the rationale for engaging Chinese philosophy given by Joel Kupperman and Bryan W. Van Norden, *inter alia*.\(^{18}\) Van Norden, for example,

\(^{17}\) Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, 2-3.

\(^{18}\) The selection of Kupperman and Van Norden emphasizes those thinkers who see Chinese philosophy as adding to, but not replacing Western philosophy. The writings of David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, offer a distinct rationale, based on what Van Norden terms a “radical” dissatisfaction with Western philosophy (see n. 9 below). Hall and Ames find the Western tradition is bound up with a “transcendental pretense” that they wish to move beyond – see part 1 of their programmatic *Anticipating China* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1985). Both Kupperman and Van Norden on the other hand, emphasize that Chinese philosophy has the capacity to pose “new” questions to the Western philosophical tradition, and therefore move philosophical study as a whole forward. For Kupperman’s views, see his *Learning from Asian Philosophy* (New York: Oxford, 1999), and “Naturalness Revisited: Why Western Philosophers Should Study Confucius” in *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*, ed. Bryan W. Van Norden (New York: Oxford, 2002), 39-52.
argues that appreciating Chinese philosophy comes from being either moderately or radically dissatisfied with Western philosophy.\textsuperscript{19} Hence, he emphasizes the need to allow Chinese traditions to ask new questions – i.e., to be appreciably different from Western philosophers – in order to a) make them interesting, and b) allow them to reshape philosophy as a discipline.

The complication here is that even though theology participates in the modern academy, it can never understand itself as a form of academic literature and discourse that transcends the traditions it happens to examine. Theology ultimately serves and exists within the Church, and as such is not a body of dialogue that contains monolithic traditions such as Aristotelianism, Platonism, and Confucianism, like a tank containing varieties of piscine species. As Anselm’s \textit{fides quaerens intellectum} demonstrates, theology is dialogical, but it is oratorian dialogue; to borrow from St. Bonaventure, it is part of the “journey of the mind to God.” Where non-Christian traditions are present in Christian theology, they are not left to their own devices, but placed within this seeking for divine things in accordance with Scripture, sacred tradition, and magisterial instruction.

In contrast to the dialogical approach is that of subjective integration taken by several Asian or Asian-American theologians such as Julia Ching, K. K. Yeo, or Heup Young Kim.\textsuperscript{20} Ching’s landmark study \textit{Confucianism and Christianity} represents for her an attempt at “a dialectical integration of the double heritage” she possesses of both


Confucianism and Christianity. Kim, for his part, emphasizes that the Confucian context of East-Asian culture necessitates Asian theology leading to an encounter between Christianity and Confucianism. The subjective dimension is the space of integration, evident in his reflection that the turn to Confucian-Christian comparative theology is part of the theological “response of one’s total being to God.” Similarly, Yeo proposes reading Confucius with Paul so as to facilitate “Chinese Christianity,” i.e., a mode of being Christian particular to those of Chinese heritage. Specifically, Yeo sees it possible to join the “two worlds” of Confucian ethics and Christian theology, and thus provide a fitting Chinese cultural model for Chinese Christianity.

My concern with these approaches is that they treat Confucianism and Christianity as two equally distinct traditions that are only held together by the believing Christian of Confucian heritage. Such studies are valuable, but they intrinsically suggest the integration of Christianity and Confucianism is only on the subjective level, by the harmonization of the two identities by the Chinese Christian. Perhaps the Protestant theologian can stop at this, but the Catholic surely cannot. In the words of Balthasar, we

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22 Though Kim does not mention it explicitly, one can surmise the existential theology of Paul Tillich in the opening paragraph of the study: “This study is grounded in my existential struggle as a Christian who has been raised in a Korean family steeped in a thousand-year history in Confucianism. The more I study Christian theology, the more I become convinced how deeply Confucianism is embedded in my soul and body, my spirituality. Subtly, but powerfully, Confucianism still works inside me, as my native religious language. If theology involves the response of one’s total being to God, it also entails a critical wrestling with this embedded Confucian tradition.” Kim, *Wang Yang-ming and Karl Barth*, 1.


24 “The book is a manifesto or apologia for Chinese Christians. It seeks to articulate how it is possible to maintain a Chinese identity and a Christian identity concomitantly without capitulating to some western or other cultural model of Christian identity.” Yeo, xxi-xxii.
must be suspect of the phenomena of national churches that make the Church appear international instead of supranational.²⁵

We must then, move on to claim and demonstrate that Confucianism can help all Christians understand the objective data of faith. Quite simply, this is a result of taking Confucianism seriously as a tradition that contains truth: from the perspective of Catholic theology, if it is true, then it participates in Christ. Hence, as a Catholic, dialogue with Confucianism will entail both respecting it as a tradition different from my own, and incorporating its wisdom into the structure of Truth itself. Consequently, a Christian interpretation of Confucian philosophy must explore how this tradition sheds light on aspects of the objective articles of faith and revealed, divine things. This is what I propose is needed, and what this dissertation attempts to provide: an objective integration of Confucian philosophy into the data of revealed truth, so that the truth can be seen in new ways, ancient insights be reinvigorated, and the catholicity of divine truth can be made evident for the Church. Remaining in a comparative methodology will limit these ends, and we must move beyond, to that of theological incorporation.

3. Comparative Theology as Incorporation

In this study, I use the term “incorporation” instead of the more traditionally important term “inculturation.”²⁶ While I have much sympathy with the project of inculturation as envisaged by Pope St. John Paul II and hold contra Peter C. Phan that philosophy is a key aspect of inculturation, I have several reasons for developing a


²⁶ I see “incorporation” as one type of method on the spectrum of comparative theology, especially similar to that adopted by Cloney. However, I have by and large avoided describing the project in terms of comparative theology in order to provide a more specific description of how the study will move forward.
In the Catholic context after Vatican II, “inculturation” largely signifies ecclesiological challenges pertaining to evangelization on the practical side, and soteriology on the doctrinal. As John Paul II used it, inculturation referred to the expression of the Gospel in various cultural forms. For John Paul II, the term was tied to an incarnational logic. Just as the divine Word – which, as St. Thomas teaches is the “eternal concept” and “exemplary likeness” of all creatures – becomes flesh in Christ, so too the universal and unchanging faith becomes incarnate and enfleshed in diverse cultures.28

The complication for this study is that inculturation can be said to start at the Incarnate Word and work toward cultural embodiment of the Gospel. However, our goal is to effect the complementary movement of inculturation, where we show how a certain cultural reality participates in the Word. The movement seems to me appreciably distinct from the expressive aspects of inculturation, though certainly complementary, and is more suited to formal imagery such as the body of Christ language (locating parts within the whole).

Moreover, a thorough process of inculturation requires keen attention to issues of praxis: ritual forms, music, etc. I am sensitive to these needs and think the approach herein is helpful in negotiating these topics. However, I also think it is important to recognize that understanding how the Gospel can be lived in a Confucian-influenced culture is more than a philosophical effort – it falls under the aegis of local bishops and

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Christians who themselves can mediate the link between faith and culture. Again, I think my project is able to assist such an end, and that the issues of praxis are both relevant to this study and worth deep consideration – indeed, they are the source of this study as my own family attempts such practical matters. Yet I think it is important to distinguish my intellectual approach of incorporation from the more general and complicated art of inculturation. At the same time, however, the reader should note I understand incorporation as part of the inculturation process described in *Fides et Ratio*, and thus ultimately as a subcategory of inculturation.

Theological incorporation is a process of intellectually weaving Confucian philosophy into the deposit of faith, incorporating it into Christ’s form of truth. This

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29 By *depositum fidei*, I am referring to more than the propositional formulae that the Church holds about the Lord as revealed in Jesus Christ. While there are propositions inherent in the act of faith that the intellect understands and can assent to, that is not the whole of faith. For example, the creedal proposition that God is the Father almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible is not an exhaustive of the deposit of faith as regards creation. Indeed, Thomas Aquinas tapped into this fullness when he appropriated the Aristotelian conception of cause and showed the true theological (rather than philosophical) basis of *creatio ex nihilo*. With this example, the creed does not show us that God is first cause so that he is the source of all motion while as yet unmoved in himself. Nor does the creed show us that it is philosophically feasible to argue for the eternality of matter, and hence creation out of nothing says something about God’s action toward the world.

This is significant for the present study because a fundamental conviction of my own is that the Church possesses what is necessary and salutary to know about God in the *depositum fidei*, but this is not necessarily in the sense of recognized possession. It is much like the Louisiana Purchase in the United States history: the Louisiana territory truly belonged to the young republic after the purchase by President Jefferson, but it was not until Lewis and Clark’s expedition that what was now possessed was truly known. If we may for the moment suspend the colonialistic implications of this example, we can see that the Church has been given by God a great inheritance of revealed faith. But we do not grasp precisely what this means in all its beauty and glory. Led by the Spirit in the conciliar tradition and the papacy, the Church continually discovers itself anew, or discovers what it has been given anew, yet in keeping with what has been discovered before.

I imagine incorporating Confucian philosophy, then, in two main senses, First, it is like stumbling upon a piece of land on my inherited property that I had not seen before, perhaps a unique rock formation or a surprise creek bed. This piece of land may look very different from what I encountered before, but it is nonetheless part of the same tract of my inheritance. At the same time, incorporating Confucian philosophy is like going onto this inherited land with a new tool, say a metal detector or binoculars. The resources of the Chinese philosophical traditions quite simply provide us new ways to discern what is in the deposit of faith. It is apparent that these resources will require imagination to understand how to relate what is new or slightly different in appearance to the propositions of the faith as we know them historically. Yet, undergirding these difficulties will remain the conviction that the deposit of faith in itself does contain these resources and aspects. This is to say, God knows they are there and has planted them accordingly as
does not mean such incorporation is a holistic valorization of Confucianism; as with ecclesial incorporation, the disciple who follows Christ does not come ready-made to function within the body. Implicit in this structure is a comparative theological method that understands Confucian doctrine and convictions as distinct from the Catholic world I inhabit. Incorporation is not rubber-stamping a different tradition, but being conformed and configured to Christ. In a sense, theological incorporation is the invitation to Confucian philosophy to find itself in the revelation of Christ, with the recognition that as with any intellectual person, this will mean reconfiguring or abandoning certain aspects while experiencing new depths to others. Given that for this study, I am the intellectual mediator of this invitation, the process will take on some idiosyncrasies and cannot represent a final word on how incorporation should take place. Yet at the same time, a true incorporation can take place, even if it is only a taste of what a fuller incorporation would be.

3.1. The Analogy of Marriage

Aaron Stalnaker, in critiquing Alasdair MacIntyre’s treatment of various traditions as rival “wholes,” advocates understanding comparative religious ethics as something like “global neighborliness.” Such an approach requires a certain

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30 Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), xiii. This terminology is a significant advance over the more abstract and platitudinous “toleration” rampant among the comparative academe. While Stalnaker certainly means to include toleration in his idea of neighborliness, the latter is based on concrete encounters (not simply “understanding” the other from afar, or “tolerating” a life that is not one’s own). As such, Stalnaker notes the various ways the relationships can develop: acquaintances, friendship, rivals, etc. Additionally, he notes that global neighborliness means the encounter is guided by “imprecise limits set by humility and tact,” meaning the shape of the encounter is not determined by a set of rules from the outset (like a moderated debate) but develops organically out of the participants as part of a shared life together.
imprecision in the making and maintenance of acquaintances, allowing the encounter to organically become whatever it will be. This idea is evocative for theological incorporation because it highlights what theoretical approaches often overlook: the experience of engaging other people in actual human associations reveals that communication and exchange between radically diverse others is not only possible, but a fundamental presupposition of human life.

Theologically, among the various forms of human relationships that might serve as apt metaphors to understanding how to approach non-Christian philosophies – friendship, among others – I believe marriage provides the most fruitful ground for the current project. This is not because marriage is a perfect analogy that can be followed systematically and clarify every aspect of theological incorporation; for example, the intrinsic complementarity of Christian marriage would require substantial clarification under my schema. Rather, it is because the analogy of marriage allows focus on the fundamental aspect that makes theological incorporation possible. Namely, it allows for the introduction of the element of transcendent agency (in our schema, the Truth of God in Christ) that gives life, meaning, and union. Hence, my use of marriage as an analog for theological incorporation is drawn from the Catholic understanding of marriage as a sacrament, as an efficient cause of grace in the lives of each spouse, precisely so as to signify the transcendent nature of Truth in which dogmas participate and which gives life to these dogmas, but is also “ever more” than the dogmas can express in human idioms.

My own experience of matrimony occurs within an intercultural marriage, which lays an impressive foundation for understanding theological incorporation. Intercultural marriages reveal most clearly how the marital union features the collision and merger of
two worlds, but not in such a way that one worldview is extirpated. Each spouse brings to the marriage the benefits and detriments of his or her own cultural situation and familial context: traditions, holidays, approaches to the task of raising children, etc. Because of this, intercultural marriages must constantly rework the question of how to arrange family values so that the culture and, many times, the language of each partner can be honored and given room for expression in the family.

The beauty of intercultural marriage lies precisely here, in the fact that the mediation of values and cultural experiences cannot be established at the outset, but must be discerned along the way. My wife is Malaysian Chinese, and a native speaker of Cantonese. Though she has become a naturalized US citizen and we have made our life together in the country of my birth, my wife has always been adamant that she wants our children to retain her culture and language as much as possible. On my part, this means that I can either leave my wife space to teach our children how to be Chinese in an American context and miss out on that part of their lives, or I can try as much as possible to adopt my wife’s culture as my own through sharing in her participation in a Chinese form of life. This requires simple, yet illuminating tasks. Soon into our marriage, my wife offered stern correction when I placed my chopsticks in my bowl of rice and let them stand up – this is extremely rude in Chinese culture as it is a symbol of death. Similarly, I had to be instructed in the proper way to pour tea, how to set up lanterns for Zhongqiu jie 中秋節, and learn to be receptive to my wife’s pointing out my various cultural peccadilloes.

Over time, I have come to identify things such as Chinese New Year not as “my wife’s culture” but as “ours.” Though I still speak Cantonese with an American accent
and many times rediscover just how American I truly am, I nevertheless am no longer simply an American. Rather, I have truly internalized what my wife has given me, and I participate in Chinese culture in some way. Put differently, a culture that is not my own has nevertheless been gifted to me through my wife, and I can make some claim not upon it, but within it. Such a claim is intensified through the progress of time, as we live out as much as we can what it means to be Chinese Catholics. But even if it is still a developing reality, this claim is real and discernible in the attempt of our family to live out both Chinese and American cultural identities together.

This points to the fact that at the heart of marriage lies openness and the gift of self to another. Within marriage, such a gift can never be abused or dominated, but must be responded to with a receptive love, an attitude of appreciative effort to internalize the gift that has been given. The Church’s laws concerning conjugal love are relevant here. Neither partner can demand or extricate such gifts out of one’s spouse – sexual abuse and rape are possible within marriage, and especially therein constitute a grave misuse of the sexual union of husband and wife. Likewise, neither partner is allowed to cut short the fullness of the other’s gift by means of contraception; this not only contravenes the fecundity of marital love, it negates the gift by allowing it only to be received on one plane, and thus rejects what the gift essentially is.  

Marital love demands and truly is the actual incorporation of two into one body, but not in such a way that either partner is disintegrated. This is because the union is both

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31 See Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, §9. See also Pope St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* §11: “…sexuality, by means of which man and woman given themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. . . The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: If the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally.”
complete and promissory in nature. It is promissory because the wedding begins the effect of grace that enables the husband and wife to be united – only a lifetime of mutual love, self-gift and reception will prove the marriage vows to the spouses. Yet the sacramental nature of the marital union shows that the subjective elements of discernment and learning to possess for one’s self his spouse’s self-gift are not constitutive of the marital union, but flow from it. That is, the union between spouses is real, transcending them both and truly uniting them in ways that is unclear for them at the outset. The mutual exchange that characterizes the marriage is enabled by the union, which is founded in the economy of grace for the salvation of the partners.32

We gain from marriage, then, two important principles regarding incorporation. First, incorporation cannot be an imperialistic plunder of resources, for this is only externalized. Rather, incorporation must be the receipt of another as she gives herself. I cannot determine at the outset how I demand to receive my wife’s life, culture, and love in the exchange of marriage, nor can she determine a priori how my own gift will be constituted. The dynamism of the gift itself requires otherness as it is. Yet the fact of receiving this gift leads not to mimesis, but to a genuine taking in and identification with the content of the gift. As such, there is something new created. My family is Catholic in two ways, American and Malaysian Chinese. We are neither completely American nor Malaysian Chinese, but this does not mean we are artificially American or spuriously Chinese; we are truly both, though perhaps not always in easily recognizable ways.

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32 Council of Trent, Session XXIV, “Christ our Lord raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament; that to husband and wife, guarded and strengthened by the heavenly grace which His merits rained for them, He gave power to attain holiness in the married state; and that, in a wondrous way, making marriage an example of the mystical union between Himself and His Church, He not only perfected that love which is according to nature, but also made the naturally indivisible union of one man with one woman far more perfect through the bond of heavenly love.”
The second principle the structure of marriage discloses is that incorporation is not merely the exchange between two diverse others. It is instead the mutual self-giving of these two diverse others within a reality that is itself given to them, and encompasses their own self-giving. The sacrament of marriage places the union of husband and wife within Christ’s gift to the Church, and his love enfolds and enacts the possibility of the union. Thus the incorporation of marriage points toward the basis of the union that expands over and beyond the partners. From the view of the spouses, incorporation is a process of working out this mystery of their already present and consummated union; but it is precisely this working out a reality rather than fabricating one that lends the union its sacramental character.

What do these principles mean for a comparative theological reading of Confucian thought? First and foremost, it means that like a spouse, the theologian must maintain an attitude of receptivity of gift, rather than domination of resources. The present case admittedly requires some imagination to consider Confucianism as truly giving itself. Yet, this is not overly onerous: Confucianism is a tradition that calls us to read its texts, learn its ways of life, and adopt them. That we receive this gift as Christians committed to and formed by the encounter with Jesus Christ does not diminish, but enriches the gift and its reception. Consequently, the theologian requires the capacity to understand what she finds in the Confucian tradition as a gift, i.e., as inherently belonging to a vast and venerable wisdom tradition that is not the same as the Christian one we inhabit. Following this, incorporating the gifts of the Confucian tradition is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Just as the spouse does not conform completely to his partner, so the task in philosophical incorporation is not to make Confucianism a simulacrum of
Christianity (which would rob it of its actual character). Rather, we will have to decide along the way which parts to incorporate into our identity as Christians, and which parts we will not.

Yet this is not merely a method of comparing similarities. Our second principle was that in marriage the development of the spouses toward one another in love is as much a discovery of their vows as something they create. So it is with all philosophical truth read in a theological key: it is truth that belongs to Christ, even if we have not yet discerned how this is so. The key to discerning what of Confucian philosophy participates in Christ’s truth and that which does not lies in this second principle. Because the union is the unfolding of a present reality rather than pure creativity, the discernment of what, when, and how to incorporate different aspects of the Confucian tradition is drawn from the union itself. In marriage, this point of union is the sacramental mystery of matrimony as a grace of God in Christ. For comparative theology, the union is the true Dao or Logos who truly does contain all truth, Jesus Christ. Thus, philosophical incorporation of Confucianism is not solely the meeting of two disparate “cultures” – Christian and Confucian Chinese. It is also a working out of the mystery of Christ, who as the ground and cause of union, can be the only means by which to judge what will and what will not be incorporated.\(^{33}\)

\(^{33}\) It is perhaps obvious at this point that what is incorporated can never be reduced to mere truth claims or arguments. That is, incorporation cannot simply derive a list of propositions from Confucians and then decide whether assent could be given to each. As we saw above (see n. 9), true incorporation entails the assumption of a justificatory structure as well. Yet there is the caveat that when a non-Christian philosophy is used to consider Christ, the justificatory structure that is taken seriously will also undergo a transformation of its own, just as the logic of the priest and expiatory sacrifice in the Priestly sources of the Old Testament are in no way capable of justifying the gift of Christ, but are rearranged in him.
3.2. Balthasar as Paradigm for Theological Incorporation

The analogy of marriage thus shows that theological incorporation requires respect for difference, but with the “ever more” of a transcendent unity that encapsulates these differences. Balthasar’s Christological use of the concept of Gestalt is apt for showing how these concepts are worked out in an intellectual program. D.C. Schindler, in his study of the structure of truth in Balthasar’s philosophy, argues that Balthasar overcomes a “metaphysics of presence” or “identitarianism” by considering difference “as a matter of truth and reason itself.” Balthasar’s use of Gestalt is key, because by this concept Balthasar understands a formal unity that is composed of parts existing in mutual dramatic tension (difference), and whose unity exceeds the composition of the parts themselves. With any Gestalt, the union is itself a “third” that grounds these differences.

If we consider various philosophical truths as parts of a whole Truth, then we begin to understand the relationship between philosophy and theology as Balthasar does. Importantly, Balthasar held a doctorate in neither philosophy nor theology, but in Germanistik, a field combining philology, literature, and philosophical studies. In his training, Balthasar learned to read texts like Faust in a non-dualistic fashion, recognizing the simultaneity, complementarity and yet distinctness of its philosophical, literary, poetic, and theological natures. Similarly, Balthasar’s approach to the distinctions between philosophy and theology is best summarized as a dramatic encounter of the

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35 See Ibid., 163-254.
dutlex ordo cognitionis of Dei Filius.\textsuperscript{36} There are discrete objects and ends for each study – philosophy contemplates the created order, theology the divine life – but this is precisely because divine revelation has two aspects. God’s self-revelation (which is one) is in some portion able to be grasped by natural reason, and in some portion only able to be grasped through supernatural aid, but it is the same order of truth in itself. Hence, for Balthasar the fundamental question posed in philosophy – why is there something instead of nothing? – is simultaneous with and complementary to theological investigations, since all “something” comes from God.

In the general introduction to the Theo-Logic, Balthasar explains that while he distinguishes a philosophical (vol. 1, Truth of the World) from a theological approach to Truth (vol. 2, Truth of God), this occurs under a substantial proviso. First, Balthasar states that, “the world as it concretely exists is one that is always already related either positively or negatively to the God of grace and supernatural revelation.”\textsuperscript{37} Pure nature cleaved from the oikonomia does not exist,\textsuperscript{38} and from this the knowledge of the natural order (the purview of philosophy) is distinct, but not divorced from the divine work. This means that the better philosophy succeeds in its operations, the more it necessarily includes theological data, the “fragrance of supernatural truth.”\textsuperscript{39} As he puts it in the final

\textsuperscript{36} Dei Filius, §4.

\textsuperscript{37} TL 1, 11.

\textsuperscript{38} Like his dear friend Henri de Lubac, Balthasar is harshly critical of the concept of natura pura, which for him is tantamount to avoiding speaking of the world as we actually encounter it, namely within the economy of grace.

\textsuperscript{39} TL1, 12.
section of *TL I* ("Truth as Participation"), finite truth has an “ontological dependence” on infinite truth since it is contingent upon God’s “free creative deed and utterance.”

In light of this overlap, Balthasar recognizes three options. The first is that of Plato, Aristotle, and other pre-Christian philosophers, who “unconsciously take over the theological data inherent in all philosophy.” This path is no longer possible for the Christian, who lives in light of explicit special revelation – though Balthasar does not explicitly state it here, his reasoning is tied to his reading of Hegel. This point should not be underestimated: for Balthasar, Hegel represents the height of “Titanism,” specifically by attempting to subsume the theological data of revelation under philosophy. But for the Christian, this path is to submit divine things to the order of human reason rather than the reverse, and is thus impossible to pursue. A second possible response to the supernatural truths found in philosophy is to “reject these truths, secularize them, and reduce them to immanent philosophical truth.” This is the path of modern rationalism, *inter al.*, and is inherently prejudiced against the possibility of divine revelation, since any revealed truths would be seen as belonging to human nature itself.

The third response is the decisively Christian possibility, and in it “one can acknowledge and accept the indelible presence of such theologoumena at the heart of concrete philosophical thinking.” Within this third option, Balthasar helpfully emphasizes that this does not mean “Christian-izing” philosophical traditions. Rather, the task is to “describe the truth of the world in its prevalently worldly character, without,

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40 Ibid., 229.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
however, ruling out the possibility that the truth we are describing in fact includes
elements that are immediately of divine, supernatural provenance.\textsuperscript{43} This point is
undoubtedly owed to the thought of philosophers like Maurice Blondel, who pushed back
against the “closed” philosophical systems of Modernity, i.e. that the shift from
metaphysics to epistemology and ontology as an attempt to shut the discipline of
philosophy off from the influence of theology or theological questions.\textsuperscript{44} Blondel, as with
Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, attempted to “open” philosophy to the infinite, and
show that though philosophy is not theology (they are distinct disciplines), to ask the
ultimate questions that philosophy poses is already to look toward the infinite horizon of
God.

For our purposes, Balthasar sees that just as the finite occurs within the bounds of
the infinite, philosophical truth functions within divine truth.\textsuperscript{45} This is corollary to a point
that will be key in later chapters. Balthasar’s theology of creation is that it occurs
“within” the Trinity, meaning the self-gift and reception of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
establishes a “distance” within God that can contain all other distances, i.e. creation. Thus
creation is truly distinct from God (there is no panentheism here), but the cosmos
functions “within” the divine “space.” This metaphor, though with its own problems,

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} For discussion and overview of Blondel’s impact on Catholic theology, see William L. Portier,
“Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel” Communio 38 (Spring

\textsuperscript{45} Philippe Capelle, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: comment regagner une philosophie a partir de la
theologie?” in Balthasar and Rahner: Deux pensees en contraste, 97-116. Capelle follows Balthasar’s
claim that the difference between he and Rahner lie in the philosophical background of each thinker
(Balthasar takes Goethe as his point of departure, Rahner takes Kant). From this, Capelle develops the
thesis that not only does Balthasar have a philosophical enterprise, but that it is linked with his theology, is
centered on analogical epistemology, and deals with the struggle of phenomenology and metaphysics, all
within the movement of “reclaiming” such philosophical investigations as a part of theology. Thus, Capelle
shows that Balthasar actively works out this sense that philosophy participates in theology, while still being
distinct.
shows how theology can both “contain” philosophical truth and yet lend it a relative autonomy.

This point is essential to Balthasar’s conception of philosophy and its uses for Christian thought. Like his friend Karl Barth, Balthasar remains ever wary of Hegel’s sublimation of theology into philosophy. Thus in the book on Barth, Balthasar emphasizes the unsystematic nature of the analogia entis that drew Barth’s famous ire. Barth sees the analogia entis as a philosophical principle that dictates theology, which Balthasar refutes not only by arguing the analogia entis is simply a description the creature’s real relationship to the Creator, but moreover by demonstrating how Catholic theology adopts philosophy in an ad hoc fashion.

Balthasar admits that theology naturally draws upon philosophy because it is human beings with cultures and philosophical reasoning who receive revelation. However, this should not be confused with the notion that Catholic theology is “systematic” in its appropriation of philosophy. Rather, the Church can appeal to manifold philosophical principles and constructs46 because “it is precisely a Church that claims she is obligated to protect the totality of revelation as a depositum fidei that will

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46 In the encyclical Fides et Ratio, Pope St. John Paul II develops the possibility of manifold philosophical approaches to truth in two important ways. First, he argues that Church serves the world as the “deacon (diakonia) of the truth” (§2). Because philosophy is derived from the basic human questions that arise in various cultures and times, the Church serves as deacon to this search in all its forms. Thus, understanding and maintaining the relationship between theology and philosophy is an essential part of the process of inculturation, particularly in Asian settings (see §72). Second is historically based, in the acknowledgment that the early Church appropriated various traditions within Greek thought (§38-42).

In light of this, one should keep in mind that Leo XIII does not reject philosophical variety as such in Aeterni Patris (see §11-13), but champions Thomistic philosophy for the sake of correcting against the infiltration of (closed) systems of Modernity that lead to confusion rather than clarity of the truth – “For it pleased the struggling innovators of the sixteenth century to philosophize without any respect for faith, the power of inventing in accordance with his own pleasure and bent being asked and given in turn by each one. Hence it was natural that systems of philosophy multiplied beyond measure, and conclusions differing and clashing with one another rose about those matters even which are the most important in human knowledge” (§24).
never be able, as Church, to hold fast to a closed-off and finished system.” This bears obvious connection to how Balthasar will develop the distinction between “aesthetic theology” and “theological aesthetics” in the opening volume of *Herrlichkeit*. By the former, Balthasar means the “measuring” of divine beauty by inner-worldly aesthetic categories; in the latter, divine glory is its own measure, and thus becomes the measure of these aesthetic categories. So it is with philosophy and theology in general: the divine life provides the “measure” for inner-worldly truth.

In making his point, Balthasar provides two important examples in the doctrine of transubstantiation and the Chalcedonian definition of the hypostatic union. Though the former draws upon Aristotelian categories and the latter deals with the philosophically enriched concepts of “person” and “nature,” neither doctrinal statement has philosophy as its object. Thus, transubstantiation does not “solemnly canonize the Aristotelian philosophy of nature” nor does Chalcedon provide “a definitive and conclusive word on the relationship between nature and person.” Philosophical concepts employed by the Church are used in a “simple and generally accessible sense, unburdened by systematic reflection.” All this is because the object of theology remains “revelation alone” which sets the stage and the limits of philosophical reflection.

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47 *KB*, 253. As Fergus Kerr, OP has noted often, one cannot miss the weight of Balthasar’s enmity toward Neo-Scholasticism (though not the Scholastics) as part of his emphatic resistance to “systematizing” and philosophical uniformity (see, *inter al.* Kerr, “Foreword: Assessing this ‘Giddy Synthesis’ in Lucy Gardner, et al., Balthasar at the End of Modernity* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999], 1-14. However, this reading is one sided. It is impossible to understand Balthasar’s allergy to systematizing without seeing his theology as a response to Hegel, in whom Balthasar finds classic “Titanism.” For discussion of this, see Cyril O’Regan, *Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar’s Response to Philosophical Modernity: Volume 1: Hegel* (Crossroads, 2014).

48 See *GL* I, 77-114.

49 *KB*, 253-54.

50 Ibid.
Through this line of thought, one readily sees one arm of Balthasar’s approach to the relationship of philosophy and theology: Balthasar understands philosophical truth as functioning relatively autonomously, but when it is appropriated by theology, philosophical truths are taken up into a new way of organization, one provided by the form and content of divine revelation. But there is one more decisive step that we must take in order to understand the full breadth of Balthasar’s insight here, namely his understanding of Christ as the Gestalt of divine revelation. Balthasar’s essay “On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy” develops in light of two Pauline maxims. Everything decisive occurs between the exhortation “test everything: hold to what is good” (1 Thess. 5:20) and the imperative “take all thoughts captive unto Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). In this essay, as for Balthasar’s friends such as Etienne Gilson,51 emphasis lies on the fact that it is the Christian (i.e., the concrete intellectual agent who has encountered God’s self-manifestation in the Word) who does the task of Christian philosophy.

This point is essential: since philosophy is done for the love of wisdom (φιλεωσοφια), it contains the element of decision to commit the entire self to pursue it. Yet for the one who lives in Christ, “there is not space in one soul for two ultimate orientations and gifts of self.”52 The Christian life is aimed at the love of God, and thus Christian philosophy becomes initiated into the eros of the ordo amoris, which will not love the

51 Gilson was part of the famous French debates on the possibility of “Christian” philosophy. Gilson held that because the Christian life permeated all aspects of the subject, this meant that the Christian philosophized distinctly from the non-Christian. This much of similarity undoubtedly obtains between Balthasar and Gilson. A further position Gilson takes is, however, to argue for a great distinction between Aristotle’s philosophy and St. Thomas Aquinas’ philosophizing, one greatly challenged in his own day and in recent scholarship. See Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); for discussion see Ralph McInerny, Praembula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2006), 39-68, 91-107, and Gregory B. Sadler, Reason Fulfilled by Faith: The 1930’s Christian Philosophy Debates in France (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2011).

52 “Catholic Philosophy,” 152. Emphasis original.
creature without reference to the Creator. Indeed, Augustine evokes the model of “that love which draws Plotinus to the infinite beauty of the ‘One’ and which makes the knowledge of this ‘One’ possible for him has no other name in the Christian thinker Augustine than love for God the triune. Philosophy and theology in him are nourished from the same _eros_.”

For the Christian thinker, this has far-ranging implications. The first of these is that Christian philosophy is indebted to theology: “the great Christian thinkers are also on occasion great philosophers, only because they are theologians.” One is reminded here forcefully of chapters 1-3 of St. Bonaventure’s _Itinerarium mentis in Deum_, in which the ascent to God assumes for itself philosophical consideration of the created order. Indeed this is profoundly so, since Bonaventure sees the ascent as bound to and even within the “form of the Crucified.” For Balthasar, it is the encounter _with Christ_ that is determinative for the Christian philosopher: “wherever Catholic philosophy is alive, the

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53 See St. Augustine’s _Confessions_, Book II, fundamentally constructed upon a renunciation of “that sort of inebriation in which the world so often forgets you, its Creator, and falls in love with your creature instead of you” (2.3.6).

54 “Catholic Philosophy”, 152-53.

55 Ibid., 154.

56 This reminder is organic to Balthasar’s thought; famously, Bonaventure is the subject of the final monograph of _GL 2_. In his recent book, Junius Johnson contends that Balthasar’s approach to philosophy is indeed derived from his reading of Bonaventure, arriving at a “Christocentric metaphysics” (see Johnson, _Christ and Analogy: The Christocentric Metaphysics of Hans Urs von Balthasar_ [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013]). In general, I agree that Balthasar’s approach to philosophy resonates with Bonaventure, but it is implausible to divide Bonaventure’s influence from that of St. Thomas as Johnson claims, just as he is incorrect to claim that Balthasar’s conception of analogy comes from Platonism, and this over-against the identity metaphysics of Plotinus. To the former point, the opening philosophical volume of the _Theo-logic_ was originally published as _Wahrheit der Welt_ in 1947 (16 years before _GL 2_), and is clearly indebted to Thomas, as is Balthasar’s commentary on the charismata in the _Summa_ (1952?). Thus, juxtaposing the dependence on Thomas to Bonaventure is unfruitful – it is better to see Balthasar as drawing upon both of the Scholastic masters.

57 The prologue to the _Itinerarium_ begins with Bonaventure’s experience of the six-winged seraph, “in the form of the Crucified” ( _ad instar Crucifixi_ ). The wings of the seraph represent each of the paths or steps taken in the ascent to God, and thus the turn to the natural order participates within this form.
eros of thought propels it outward, over the penultimate sphere of the objects of philosophical thought, into the sphere of the personal divine Logos.” 58 In a different tone, Balthasar recognizes that the “decision” of philosophical love of wisdom for the Christian occurs within the decision for Christ. Hence, the Christian philosopher cannot divorce philosophy from theology, for he will then either “secularize what is clearly theological matter in philosophy…or else he will fall victim to the curse of that deadly dullness which is typical of most of the handbooks of neo-Scholastic philosophy.” 59

But how does the Christian take up forms of philosophy into the theological task? Balthasar suggests two skills or arts: 1) that of “breaking open all finite, philosophical truth in the direction of Christ” and 2) that of “the clarifying transposition.” 60 The first art is essentially the Blondellian project: refusing finite truth a radically individualized life, and demonstrating the former’s already present congress with divine truth. This begins in the Christian recognition that in the encounter with Christ, we have met not simply one master among others, but the infinite truth of the Word of God expressed in finite form. As such, the infinite for which philosophy gropes and groans has come to earth and consequently the veil between ratio and theologia is rent (à la Matt. 27:51). This then leads Balthasar to the following formulation, worth quoting at length:

But if one’s boundaries are broken open ever afresh and ever more widely in the knowledge of Christ, so that one enters into the truth which lies in him and above him, the truth of the infinite love between the Father and the Son, into this ever illimitable testimony which is one (Jn 8:14) and yet double (Jn 5:31f.) because it has the Trinitarian form; if one has learned to locate the essence of truth in general in this unique mystery of the love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, and one is able now to see all other truth as only a reflection of

59 Ibid., 155.
60 Ibid., 156.
This innermost kernel of truth—then one will also have grasped that, just as the archetype of the revealed truth, the Son, is true because he eternally opens himself to the infinite Father, then a fortiori all the finite truth of this world can establish itself as truth only by opening out onto the mystery of God. Thus it is not for nothing that the Fathers adopt the term 'philosophia' for the Christian act of thinking of the revealed truth, precisely also in its function of breaking through the boundaries of all pagan truth in the direction of Christ...

Thus the Fathers and especially the exemplary work of St. Thomas presuppose the “openness” of finite truth, and show confidence that all of human thought can be enlisted for Christian understanding and proclamation. “They are so deeply convinced of the all-embracing authority of Christ not only over all creatures in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, but also over all forms of creaturely truth, that they cannot rest until they have brought all these forms into the service of the one truth.”61 Within this task, all that is truthful can be brought to service, except of course that which “[refuses] to serve the total truth.”62 Hence Balthasar cites Aquinas, Leibniz63, and Newman as being able to pick out stones from a pagan or heretical stream and “they know how to cleanse it and to polish it until that radiance shines forth which shows that it is a fragment of the total glorification of God.”64 Similarly, in a 1972 essay entitled “Evangelium und Philosophie,” Balthasar describes the path of Arianism as “taking the space of the Greek horizon of knowledge and press into it the historical revelation in Christ.” The way of the councils, however, was to “blast open, to stretch through, to transpose” the “closed Greek thought” to win

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61 “Catholic philosophy”, 158.

62 Ibid., 159.

63 Balthasar does not mention explicitly why he thinks of Leibniz, but Leibniz was the most influential European philosopher to seriously engage Chinese philosophy, though his understanding of Confucian thought in particular is largely challenged today. Perhaps this signifies a latent argument that Balthasar truly does think Chinese philosophy can be brought into the work of theology as well.

64 Ibid., 159.
for the mystery of the faith these forms of expression (*Ausdruckformen*) in order to liberate sinful humanity.\(^{65}\)

But this breaking open works also in the other direction, in transposition. It is not merely that the Christian thinker takes plural truths to the one Truth, but also one must understand how the one Truth is born out among the plurality of philosophical idioms. Balthasar emphasizes the work of those such as Joseph Marechal and Erich Pryzwara as models of transposition. Of the former he praises, “Kant has never been understood more deeply and thoroughly by a Catholic philosopher.”\(^{66}\) This is a vitally important step, for if the relation between the One Truth and the many truths is to be understood, the Christian thinker must be able to truly understand philosophy on its own terms before she can understand the place of that philosophy within the *Gestalt* of Christ as Truth. Hence, Balthasar stresses the need for the Christian thinker to read the philosophers of old, rather than just textbooks,\(^{67}\) in order to truly encounter these forms of thought. Only then can we genuinely discern the spirit of a philosopher or philosophy; only then can we be said to have authentically tested that which we wish to hold and call “good.”

Once the Christian gains a genuine understanding of philosophy in this way, he or she can then discern the place of a given philosophy within the form of Truth. Though

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\(^{66}\) “Catholic Philosophy,” 161.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 162-63.
Christ is, horizontally, the “ungraspable” midpoint, all truths stand in relation to this midpoint. Thus, it is not merely that the Christian thinker scavenges part of a tradition for his own, borrowing haphazardly or proof-texting to his heart’s content. Rather, the Christian thinker must understand what is truly present in a given tradition or thinker and not distort it, but hold it up to the light of Truth and see what qualities harmonize and which do not. It is the practice of allowing the participated Truth of philosophical knowledge to shine through, rather than a construction of truth. It is testing and holding, a purification rather than refurbishment.

In summarizing Balthasar’s approach to the integration of philosophy in theology, two images from the gospels come to mind that apply to a reading of Confucianism under a theological lens. The first is taken from Mark 2, in which four friends take their paralytic companion to Christ in Capernaum. In this image, the Christian theologian is much like one of the friends, carrying the companion to Jesus, lowering him amongst the teacher, i.e., simply laboring for an encounter between the dear friend and the Word made flesh. We should not neglect either how the story ends, with Jesus restoring the paralytic to both spiritual and physical health. He does not transfigure or modify the man – he does not dole out prosthetics - but restores him to his native and acquired capacities. Jesus’ words “take up your mat and walk” foreshadow the general call of discipleship “take up your cross and follow me.” In other words, the encounter with Jesus has enabled the paralytic to participate in discipleship; the role of the friend is to simply carry one’s companion to Christ.

Of course, if this image should suggest too much criticism of Confucian philosophy – what, then, is its paralysis? – perhaps another is more preferable. In John
1:45-51, the disciple Philip runs to his friend Nathanael, and tells him he has found the Messiah. Nathanael disbelieves until Jesus comes and says that he saw Nathanael sitting under a fig tree. After this, Nathanael enters into discipleship to Christ. This imagery helps to reconstruct what seems to be Balthasar’s point: like Philip, the Christian thinker calls his friend, in this case Confucian philosophy, to recognize the Truth of the Messiah. Again, this must lead to an encounter, but in this Nathanael (Confucianism) will not be asked to conform to the life of Philip or Peter. Rather, Nathanael will be asked to serve Christ as Nathanael; Confucian philosophy must be asked to serve the Truth of Christ as Confucian philosophy.68

Because we speak of a philosophical tradition rather than a person, of course, the process of discernment means not everything will stand the test of being “the good.” But such is also the case with Nathanael – his presuppositions about the Messiah and the region of Nazareth, and his incredulity as Jesus’ vision of him will fall away in the encounter with Christ. So too some aspects of Confucianism do not serve the Christological form of Truth. But the service rendered is true service, and thus whatever truth Confucianism genuinely possesses also authentically participates in the form of

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68 This should not be taken to mean, however, that Confucian philosophy can be integrated within the Truth of Christ on its own terms, or that it should be freed from all relations to other forms of philosophical reflection within Christian theology. What I defend here is that there is simply no need to force Confucian philosophy to “speak Greek or Latin,” i.e., we can allow concepts like xin 心 (“heart-mind”) and qi 氣 (“vapor”) be what they are without having to identify them explicitly as parts of a Western anthropology of the soul. Yet at the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the integration of Confucian philosophy is a historical moment, and it stands in relation to the historical Catholicity of the Church. There is a need to be cognizant and respectful of the fact that God’s revelation came first to the Jewish people, and then to those who encountered this revelation with the resources of Greek and Latin philosophy.

Because of this, the use of Confucian philosophy presumes a historical (though not essential) priority on the Greek and Latin forms of thought and how they have been used in Christian theology. Concretely this means, for example, that I am beholden to an account of the soul that is articulated in Western philosophy and central to Christian theology. In turning to Confucian philosophy, I can recognize there is no explicit development of the body/soul distinction or a full account of the psychological faculties that are important to Christian theologies, but I will seek to see how Confucian philosophy can complement the Western view, rather than take it as a new foundational model.
Thus, “breaking open” a tradition towards Christ and then “transposing” it need not suggest either a lack of regards for the distinctiveness of a given tradition or a devaluation of its own understanding of philosophical truth. What it attempts to do is to show how a given philosophical truth is already circumscribed by divine truth just as God circumscribes the world. Theological incorporation, according to Balthasar, is drawing out how inner-worldly truths participate in and can serve divine truth.

4. Methodological Implications

In summary, theological incorporation requires the disposition of genuine appreciation of the otherness of Confucian philosophy – the conviction that Confucian truth participates in Christ is not to ignore the differences between Confucianism as a system of thought and the Catholic dogmatic formulae or theological imagination. At the same time, it requires the *eros* of the Christian life that simply desires to know, understand, and love God. Just as marriage is an invitation to share in the life of another through the exchange of gifts, so theological incorporation of Confucianism is an attempt to cast this tradition in the drama of what has been revealed in Christ, though of course mediated from my own conception of how the part will be played. Thus, theological incorporation is not interested in understanding Confucian or Christian doctrines simply for their own sake, but for the purpose of fulfilling this *eros* that is Christian discipleship.

Although I am not concerned with methodology as such in this chapter, there are some noteworthy principles that arise in light of the general dispositions sketched above. The first is that in the theological incorporation that follows, I emphasize the distinction

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69 *Nostra Aetate*, §2. “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlighten all men and women [i.e., Christ].”
of the study of Confucianism and Balthasar. This is so that the reader can hear each voice in its own distinctiveness before incorporation occurs. Otherwise we risk not only creating amenable straw men, but more importantly, the true gift-content of either Confucian or Balthasar’s thought will be overlooked. Within this, I have stressed not only distinction of these thought-forms, but also a distinction in mastery. Theological incorporation fails is the scholarly mastery lies only on one tradition, and especially if a non-Christian tradition is understood only peripherally. Hence, the chapters are divided into two distinct parts of lengthy examinations and scholarly engagements, with the Incorporational move saved for the concluding chapter.

Another aspect of this need to maintain the unique gift-content of Confucianism and Balthasar is my reticence to “translate” terminology and constructs from each thought-form into the other except for in the explicit incorporational move. For example, I have endeavored to describe the Confucian philosophical tradition according to its own grammar, context, and justificatory structure rather than put its insights in “Christian

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70 Alasdair MacIntyre, “Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues” in *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosphic Perspectives*, ed. Eliot Deutsch (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 104-23. In this essay, MacIntyre argues for a forceful account of incommensurability based on what David B. Wong calls “incommensurability of justification” (see Wong, “Three Kinds of Incommensurability” in *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. Michael Krausz [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989], 140-58). MacIntyre’s argument is a rebuttal to the comparative philosopher who would hope the dialogue between two traditions would provide a neutral ground from which to judge the traditions. His argument is that the Aristotelian and Confucian accounts of the good life are incommensurable because they cannot be brought together into one account. Moreover, anyone who wishes to evaluate either tradition will do so as part of an extant tradition already: “Any account which is rich enough in its identifications and characterizations to be genuinely relevant to the evaluation of a set of theoretical claims concerning the virtues will in fact turn out already to presuppose in those identifications and characterizations some one such theoretical stance regarding the virtues, rather than its rivals. That is to say, every major theory of virtues has internal to it, to some significant degree, its own philosophical psychology and its own philosophical politics and sociology” (105). MacIntyre’s insight poses a significant challenge to the prospect of theological incorporation: will not a Christian reared in the Western tradition, indelibly marked by Thomism, judge and evaluate the Confucian philosophical tradition in terms of the Thomistic tradition rather than its own?

One way to move forward from this is to stress that theological incorporation is not a “neutral” position from which to judge two philosophical systems, but the integration of philosophical insights into Christian proclamation. As such, the justificatory structure of Christian theology can both include aspects
terms.” Of course, given that my audience is primarily theological, there are some moments where I allow the liberty to elucidate a given principle through theological analog; this is a concession for the sake of the reader, though one I don’t feel obscures the Confucian nature of these texts. Part of the rationale for this is that theological incorporation is not merely attempting to see whether Confucian philosophers can “speak Christian”, but to discern where and to what degree God’s revelation in Christ fulfills and reimagines Confucian insights. In other words, theological incorporation assumes that even though Christian doctrine is expressed in Western idioms, there is room within Christian doctrine to understand the data of revelation genuinely in the Confucian idiom, rather than only in translation.71

A third implication is that theological incorporation is aided by a theological investigation that helps the thinker to discern the Christological form of Truth in which Confucian philosophy will be located. Above, I made mention of philosophers such as Bryan W. Van Norden and Joel Kupperman who argue that the turn to Chinese philosophy is largely necessary due to dissatisfaction with Western philosophy or of a philosophical system’s justificatory structure, while also transcending this structure with its own, provided by logic of revealed truth (fides et ratio). For example, St. Thomas Aquinas invests heavily in Aristotle’s justification for philosophical positions, such as the virtues, and is in this sense Aristotelian. At the same time, Thomas recognizes that philosophical truth is not the only justificatory structure extant in Christianity, but this is not necessarily or even typically an antagonistic difference. The greatest instance of this idea is in the disputed question De aeternitate mundi. Here Aquinas argues that it is not a philosophical error that Aristotle considers matter eternal, but it is still an error. Thus, Aquinas both adopts Aristotle’s justificatory structure (acknowledging it is philosophically sound) and simultaneously transcends it (by appealing to the data of revelation regarding creatio ex nihilo). Similar moves are possible with Confucianism, so that the Christian need not dispense with the Confucian justificatory structure, but can integrate it within the theological enterprise.

71 Again, we can draw upon the imagery of Nostra Aetate §2, and consider seeing Confucian insights as reflecting a “ray of that truth which enlightens all men.” When light passes through a prism, we can see more clearly the qualities of the light. We do not for this reason confuse or commingle the prism and the light, but we recognize the prism’s unique shape and quality are necessary for its mediation of the rays of light in its particular ways. Similarly, we can recognize that the form of Confucian thought allows certain aspects of the gospel to be given greater clarity. There is no need to re-shape the prism of Confucian thought to conform more closely to a more familiar philosophical language, but we can hold up Confucianism as its own important prism, and observe how the Light passes through it.
philosophical traditions. Hence, for these thinkers, it is vital to allow Confucian philosophy to ask “new” questions, and not simply ask Confucianism to weigh in on traditional philosophical problems of the West, such the soul-body relation. In light of this, it would seem that one complication of theological incorporation, especially with Christology, is that we are asking Confucianism to weigh in on questions the boundaries of which are well established. The history of general councils seems at first glance to provide narrow lanes in which to ask theological questions. Can Confucianism, asked to function within the bounds of orthodox Catholicism, be helpful or even genuinely itself, since the questions we ask are not the ones posed by Confucian thinkers?

Ultimately, the problem is not as complicated as it appears. On the one hand, even though the general councils provide incalculably important structure to the proclamation about Christ, they never claimed to be and have never been read as exhausting the truth that God has revealed in Christ. Put differently, Christian dogma is not a set list of questions with their appropriate answers, but rather a “space” in which Christian life takes place. It is a structure that gives life, not sterility; a form that liberates from open-ended ignorance, not a restriction of the intellect or wonder.

In light of this, the theological incorporation below examines Balthasar’s thought as a way to “construct” a theological “space” that will allow the Confucian insights to be fruitful. In this case, Balthasar allows the particular aspects of Christian proclamation regarding the filial obedience and love of the eternal Son to be given greater emphasis, preparing a fertile ground in which to plant the specific seed of the Confucian xiao. However, this should not be understood to mean that Balthasar will provide the “questions” that Confucianism will answer. Rather, Balthasar provides a sense of the
Christological form of Christian Truth into which we will attempt to incorporate Confucian insights and questions.
CHAPTER 2

THE SPIRITUAL CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE OF CHRISTOLOGICAL LOVE AND OBEDIENCE IN HANS URS VON BALTHasar

1. Introduction

In a justly famous essay, Balthasar once defined theology as done “on one’s knees.”¹ The source of that idea and the thesis of his essay is Balthasar’s lament of what he perceived as a cleavage between spirituality and dogmatic theology. Mark A. McIntosh has already shown Balthasar’s primary solution: he asserts the lives of the saints are an important principle for understanding God’s encounter with the world. Christologically, this means that “through the saints, each moment of Christ’s existence is made continually and newly present in his Body, and it is von Balthasar’s aim to enlist these experiences in deepening the Body’s understanding of what has taken place in the Head.”² From this, we see that for Balthasar, there is an inextricable and ineluctable link between the encounter with Christ and the theological reflection on Christ.

Although McIntosh emphasizes Balthasar’s use of the saints as resources for theological reflection, an implicit feature of this “Christology from within” is that Balthasar’s own experiences lead him to develop his Christology in particular ways.


² Mark A. McIntosh, Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2000), 25.
Beginning here, this chapter seeks to explore the spiritual structure behind Balthasar’s Christology of love and obedience. This is not to imply some psychological reductionism, as though Balthasar’s Christology is merely a “projection” (à la Feuerbach) of his subjective spirituality. Rather, it is to attempt to answer the question of why does Balthasar give the theme of love and obedience in Christ such a central and fundamental role in his theology?

No theologian comes to develop Christology as a *tabula rasa*. Experience and context affect our understanding of the data of revelation, not in an eisegetical sense, but in terms of sharpened perception. For example, were an ornithologist and a botanist to walk together through the woods, both would perceive the forest as it is. However, the training, experience, and interests of each would lead the ornithologist to perceive the beauty and diversity of the forest in a different, but no less true way, than the botanist; the former would notice variations between cardinals or sparrows, but not appreciate the floral miscellany as would the botanist. Our question can then be refined: what experiences or insights prepare Balthasar to perceive and explore the theme of Christ’s love and obedience? Or, in a different key, how does Balthasar actually come to encounter Christ, and how does the form of this encounter shape his Christological compositions?

This chapter focuses on three principal concrete historical events of Balthasar’s life: his entry into the Jesuits in 1931, his partnership with Adrienne von Speyr beginning

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3 Lochbrunner, *Analogia Caritatis*, 21. Lochbrunner is one of the few who have emphasized Balthasar’s biographical material as truly intrinsic to his thought. This is because, as he puts it, we only know God’s word (*Theos legōn*) through God’s speaking (*Theos legomenos*) i.e., “in the intellectual and linguistic forms of humanity (*Denk- und Sprachgestalt des Menschen*).” Thus, following Lochbrunner, the task of this chapter is not merely to describe Balthasar’s biography, but rather is about his theological work, “which is of course expressed unignorably (*unüberhörbar*) through his person.”
in 1940, and his exit from the Society of Jesus to co-found the Community of St. John in 1950. Developing the context of these events allows us to perceive the spiritual experiences in Balthasar’s life that affect his Christology. Specifically, behind these events lies threefold and mutually enriching encounter with St. Ignatius of Loyola, with von Speyr, and with spirit of St. John the Evangelist. Through these spiritual experiences, Balthasar is not only introduced into an encounter with God structured upon the interplay between love and obedience, he also understands Christ in this matrix. Thus, the “spiritual structure” here is essential to appreciating the Christological insights to be explored and organized in subsequent chapters.

2. Balthasar the Jesuit: The Impact of Ignatius and the Exercises

Generally speaking, it is impossible to describe the character of 20th century Catholic theology without mentioning the impact of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Spiritual Exercises. It is no coincidence that the contentious and long-standing debate on nature and supernature passes through Jesuit hands. Both Henri de Lubac’s Surnaturel and Karl Rahner’s Geist im Welt owe great debt to the Ignatian spiritual anthropology cultivated through the Exercises, which is best summarized in its opening principle: “Man has been created for this: to praise God Our Lord, and revere Him, and to serve


5 See de Lubac, Surnaturel: études historiques (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), and Rahner, Spirit in the World, rev. J. B. Metz, trans. William V Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) Both works exhibit the instinct to read nature economically, i.e., as a movement of grace itself, such that man’s natural happiness and life is supernaturally imbued. Though Rahner applies this point more existentially than does de Lubac, one can perceive the same basic Ignatian vision lying behind both.
Him, and so save his soul.” 6 Unlike his friends and erstwhile confrères de Lubac and Rahner, 7 Balthasar would not die a Jesuit, but as with them his time in the Society left an indelible mark on his theology. 8 Indeed, Jacques Servais, SJ describes Balthasar as possessing an “inchoate theology of the Exercises” in which the Swiss theologian’s conception of Christ as Gestalt (figure du Christ) flows out of the source of Ignatian spirituality. 9

But it is not enough to simply say that Balthasar was impacted by the Exercises and the latent anthropology therein. After all, Balthasar does not write either Surnaturel or Geist im Welt, though certainly sympathetic with the former. His debt to Ignatius, as Servais points out, is fundamentally Christological (or perhaps better, Christocentric), and the reasons for this undoubtedly lie in the manner in which Balthasar encountered the

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7 It is often forgotten by the polemic-minded that Balthasar and Rahner worked together before Vatican II, and always retained healthy respect for one another. Balthasar was undoubtedly closer to de Lubac, Jean Danielou (with whom he had studied at Fourviere), and Cardinal Ratzinger, and was fiercely critical of parts of Rahner’s approach, but did not dismiss it. Rahner, for his part, wrote a glowing summary of Balthasar’s work, which has recently been reprinted in Logik der Liebe, 506-10.

8 Lochbrunner, Analogia Caritatis, 35. “The Ignatian pathos flows in Balthasar’s work and runs throughout, as if it were his own.” Unfortunately, American scholars (with the prodigious exception of McIntosh) largely overlook or at least do not emphasize this aspect of Balthasar’s thought. In contrast, several notable European colleagues – Jesuits, unsurprisingly – have persistently attended to this feature of Balthasar’s thought. Of these, three deserve especial mention for the reader interested in the subject: Peter Henrici, SJ, Balthasar’s cousin, who in addition to being an important philosopher in his own right at the Gregorium has been the most important expositor of Balthasar’s biography (apart from Elio Guerrero and Manfred Lochbrunner). See, e.g., his book Hans Urs von Balthasar: Der Aspekte seiner Sendung (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 2008). Werner Löser, SJ has given the Ignatian spirit of Balthasar’s corpus fine exposition; see e.g., Löser, “Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine ignatianischen und patristischen Quellen” Geist und Leben 79 (2006): 194-203, and Löser, “Hans Urs von Balthasar und Ignatius von Loyola” in Walter Kardinal Kasper, ed. Logik der Liebe und Herrlichkeit Gottes: Hans Urs von Balthasar im Gespräch (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 2006): 94-110. Also, Jacques Servais, SJ, has dedicated much time and energy to exploring Balthasar’s thought along the Ignatian axis. His most important work on the subject is Théologie des Exercices spirituels (Bruxelles: Culture et Vérité, 1996).

9 Servais, Théologie des Exercices spirituels, 28.
founder of the Jesuits. Thus, we must go back to the beginning, and understand Balthasar’s spiritual journey that led him to enter the Society of Jesus.

Balthasar was born in 1905 to an almost entirely Catholic family in Lucerne, Switzerland.\(^{10}\) Of his heritage he makes reflection that, “the old Lucerne family into which I was born did indeed possess a liberal ancestor or two (one was even placed on the Index), but my parents were so instinctively Catholic as if nothing more natural existed in the world.”\(^{11}\) Balthasar inherited from his parents this same “Catholic instinct,” in addition to other impressive gifts: though a rather frail youth, Balthasar showed from an early age a “passion for all things beautiful” in the words of his mother,\(^ {12}\) and evinced precocious skill in music, literature, and linguistics.

Significantly for the young Balthasar, both his spirituality and academic interests shared a profound indeterminateness. In his recollections, Balthasar notes that though he was keen to prayer and always had a fondness for the Blessed Mother, he was not practiced in disciplines that would suggest a particular spiritual path – he simply had a faith “unassailed by any doubts.”\(^ {13}\) Perhaps part of the reason lies in his education, which was in youth among Franciscan churches, begun at a Benedictine gymnasium, and then

\(^{10}\) Philippe Charpentier de Beauvillé, “Repères biographiques pour Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Chrétiens dans la société actuelle*, 24-32. Drawing heavily upon the work of historian Urs Altermatt, de Beauvillé draws attention to the importance of growing up in Lucerne as a “benchmark” (repère) for Balthasar’s formation. In particular, de Beauvillé notes that in the intense encounter (often bellicose or ruptorous) between the Catholic Church, Protestantism, and Modernity, Switzerland was often ground zero. Lucerne in this confrontation was a center of Catholic life, magisterial and laity. For an extended discussion of the history of Swiss Catholicism, de Beauvillé cites Altermatt, *Le catholicisme au défi de la modernité. L’histoire sociale des catholiques suisses aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris: Payot-Lausanne, 1994).

\(^{11}\) Test Everything, 10.


\(^{13}\) See Henrici, “A Sketch”, 10. Henrici writes that Balthasar possessed “a simple and straightforward faith, unassailed by any doubts, a faith which, to the very end, remained childlike in the best sense.”
concluded at the Jesuit gymnasium at Feldkirch. When he entered university at Vienna, Balthasar did not feel a special calling to any course of study, and chose Germanistik largely because it combined study in literature, philology, and semantics, each of which he enjoyed.

What is most important from Balthasar’s first 22 years of life, for our purposes, is his lack of clarity regarding the telos of his studies and interests. He was undoubtedly talented in many fields, and nursed a wide range of practices and interests. De Lubac famously called Balthasar “the most cultured man of our age,” and he perhaps was – but the cultivation was broad, almost open-ended, and had little of the formal coherence that would mark Balthasar’s later thought. Indeed, in his report on the Community of St. John, Balthasar recollects, “I had taken up the study of philology out of love of German literature; I also did some philosophy, Sanskrit, and Indo-European linguistics. It never occurred to me what I’d do with all this knowledge in later life.”

In the summer of 1927, Balthasar’s life was forever altered when he attended a thirty-day retreat of the Spiritual Exercises. During this retreat, his first encounter with St. Ignatius’ spiritual disciplines, Balthasar was jolted by an experience he would never forget. In 1955, he recalled it in evocative terms:

> Even now, thirty years later, I could still go to that remote path in the Black Forest, not far from Basel, and find again the tree beneath which I was struck as by lightning. . . . And yet it was neither theology nor the priesthood which then came into my mind in a flash. It was simply this: you have nothing to choose, you have been called. You have no plans to make, you are just a little stone in a mosaic which has long been ready. All I needed to do was ‘leave everything and follow’, and without making

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15 OT, 36-37. Emphasis mine.
plans, without wishes or insights. All I needed to do was to stand there and wait and see what I would be needed for." \(^{16}\) (Emphasis mine)

For Balthasar, the Ignatian charism of obedience as openness to God formed and reverberated within his spirit, and he could not let loose of it. \(^{17}\) After his beloved mother’s death and the completion of his doctorate in 1929, Balthasar began the process of entering the Society of Jesus, which he would complete in 1931.

This encounter in the Black Forest requires keen attention in order to understand Balthasar’s Christology of love and obedience. \(^{18}\) As his recollection profoundly proves, Balthasar understood the specific encounter with God through the *Exercises* to be about the call to obedience to Christ’s Person, rather than the content of Christ’s Word. \(^{19}\) The *virtue* of obedience is what struck Balthasar so strongly: not a specific call to be obedient unto this or that particular thing, but simply the need to be open to God’s self-revelation. In Balthasar’s mind, this indeed becomes the definition of holiness (which is, of course,

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\(^{16}\) “Pourquoi je me suis fait pretre”, taken from Henrici, “A Sketch”, 11.

\(^{17}\) Löser, “Being Interpreted as Love: Reflections on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar” *Communio* 16 (Fall 1989): 475-90, here 482. Löser calls this event “the actual turning point in von Balthasar’s life and thought.” He continues: “The key to ‘understanding’ his person as well as his work is this obedient Yes to the call to follow Christ that, according to his own testimony, he spoke at that time.”

\(^{18}\) Löser, “Hans Urs von Balthasar und Ignatius von Loyola,” 98. Löser argues that Balthasar’s interpretation of Ignatius is divergent from the two main conceptions, that of Ignatius as a semi-pelagian acetic or as a mystic. Rather, he argues Balthasar has a dramatic interpretation of Ignatius, based on the encounter between the electing God and the elected human person: “The choosing God and the God’s-choice choosing Man: here is where the basic structure of reality meets.” From this, Löser claims that all of Balthasar’s later theology is working out this drama, including his Christology.

\(^{19}\) Jacques Servais, SJ. “Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Continuing Youthfulness of the *Exercises*,” trans. Mark Sebanc, *Communio* 21 (Summer 1994): 333-38. Servais point to a comparison Balthasar perceives between Luther’s conception of faith as bound to the Word, rather than the Person of Christ, and the perspective of St. Ignatius. According to Balthasar, for Ignatius the Person of Christ communicates absolute love, and hence the summons is to “come follow me.”
in itself Marian) in the abandonment of choice and the reception of being chosen and called (missio).\textsuperscript{20}

At this point, we must linger a while on the \textit{Exercises} in order to appreciate the Christological arc of this experience. Balthasar was profoundly impacted by the \textit{Exercises} – by 1965 he had not only translated an edition, but had led retreats “some hundred times.”\textsuperscript{21} He described it as the “great school of Christocentric contemplation” comprised of a “lifelong commitment to the attempt at following, which for Ignatius is above all a decision regarding the form that a Christian may lend in his own life to the Lord’s attitude of total and loving renunciation.”\textsuperscript{22} The \textit{Exercises} are built upon meditations on the life and mysteries of Christ, and the second week is particularly decisive, situated between the imagery of the Kingdom of Christ and the call of election.\textsuperscript{23} In this process, the retreatant calls to mind the image of an earthly king who must be obeyed, and recognize how much more so this applies to Christ.

On the third day of the second week, this theme takes an important development. With the mediation on the presentation of Jesus in the Temple and his being found by Joseph and Mary, St. Ignatius reminds the retreatant that Christ not only must be obeyed, but he serves as an example of “the kind of life consisting of the observance of God’s commandments.” The child Jesus left his mother and adoptive father to be in the Temple, which Ignatius explains is done “in order to be free for the service of the Eternal Father.”

\textsuperscript{20} The Ignatian tradition calls this attitude “indifference” (\textit{indiferencia}).

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{My Work}, 51-52. See \textit{Die Exerzitien}, trans. Balthasar. In addition to the translation, Jacques Servais has collected the mentions and interpretations of the \textit{Exercises} that are scattered across Balthasar’s corpus into one volume, \textit{Texte zum ignatianischen Exerzitienbuch}, ed. Jacques Servais, SJ (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1993).

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 51.

\textsuperscript{23} Balthasar labels the second week as “Der Ruf,” i.e., “the call.”
Consequently, this meditation upon Christ’s state of life precisely in his obedient and loving openness to the Father is the most apt place to begin to ask “which proper kind of life He prefers for us to serve His majesty.”

The next day, the retreatant considers the juxtaposition between Christ’s state of life and that of Lucifer. The former is one of perfect love and obedience, the other of enmity and rebellion. This then leads one to see that Christ’s state of life is absolute humility and obedience, which prepares the meditation of the three kinds of men. Of these, there is a most perfect kind, who instead of wishing God to conform to his own wishes, desires only to be conformed to God in perfect obedience. All this culminates when, in the midst of considering Jesus’ journey from Nazareth to the Jordan – i.e., the public acceptance and initial public movement of his concrete mission – the retreatant is given the meaning of true election. Ignatius writes, “they are wrong who decide first to take a wife, or to accept an ecclesiastical office or benefit, and then, afterward, to serve God in that state: They are reversing the order of the ends and the means, not going straight to God but trying instead to draw him by a crooked path to their perverse wishes.”

In short, election follows upon Christ’s own “being free” for service, rather than dictating from the start what the form of service and life will be.

From St. Ignatius, Balthasar learns not only that Christ chooses and elects the Christian, but that Christ is the ground that makes such election intelligible. Balthasar’s

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24 *Exercises*, 37.

25 Ibid., 44.

26 Christopher W. Steck, SJ, *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2001), 67ff. Steck emphasizes the objective side of this claim, that “obedience is an integral part of the Christian life not because it is the logically appropriate response to a God who is omnipotent and free, but because it is a response to God’s revelation in Christ.” This is a fundamental point I expound upon in Chapter 3 – Christian obedience is not a movement of natural reason, but is dependent upon revelation.
momentous sense of finding himself open to God – “you have nothing to choose; you have been called” – is not amorphous. In the context of the Exercises it is, rather, a Christoform (indeed cruciform) conception of openness and obedience. Hence Balthasar’s “decision” to enter the Jesuits comes on the heels of an encounter with Christ as this form and norm of obedience. Less than twenty years after this initial retreat, Balthasar began work on a work about the various states of life for the Christian, eventually published in 1977 as Christlicher Stand (E.T. The Christian State of Life). This work and its long gestation are grounded in the spiritual encounter of the Exercises, where the state of election is seen as nothing less than entering into Christ’s own state of life – that of perfect love and obedience for God.27

It follows that the Exercises awakened Balthasar to the obediential aspects of Christ’s life – indeed, in 1986, Balthasar commented, “Before Ignatius, no one had grasped Christ’s obedience to the Father in quite so central a way.”28 This Ignatian insight runs through Balthasar’s Christology, not only through the formal concept of mission that transforms his understanding of the hypostatic union,29 but by informing

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27 CSL, 9. Balthasar writes, “The sole purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive meditation on the foundations and background of St. Ignatius’ contemplation of the ‘Call of Christ,’ on the answer we must give if we want to ‘give greater proof of [our] love, and on the choice explicitly demanded of us: either to follow Christ our Lord to ‘the first state of life, which is that of observing the commandments,’ of which he has given us an example by his obedience to his parents; or to follow him to ‘the second state, which is that of evangelical perfection,’ of which he has given us an example by leaving his family ‘to devote himself exclusively to the service of his eternal Father.’”

28 Test Everything, 89.

29 McIntosh, 42. McIntosh contends that Balthasar’s Christology is fundamentally a result of Balthasar’s reading of St. Maximus the Confessor’s conception of hypostasis transposed into the Ignatian concept of mission. I will draw more on this argument in chapter 4. At this point, I cite this to emphasize that the Exercises are not only an important conceptual paradigm for Balthasar’s Christology, especially in
Balthasar as to the central aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation: loving obedience and obediential love. Through Ignatius, Balthasar learns to see Christ as the one who not only bestows missions and election upon Christians, but himself fulfills a mission to the Father in perfect love and obedience. Yet the Jesuit foundation is only part of the spiritual structure necessary to understand Balthasar’s reading of Christ’s filial love and obedience. The next level lies in his meeting Adrienne von Speyr, with whom Balthasar was ushered into her mystical experiences of Christ’s passion and thus, obedience.

3. Balthasar as Spiritual Director: The Co-mission with Adrienne von Speyr

After beginning his two-year novitiate with the Jesuits in 1929, Balthasar then studied philosophy at Pullach for two years before transitioning to theological studies at Fourviere. There under the unofficial mentorship of Henri de Lubac, Balthasar was introduced to the study of the Church Fathers, especially Origen and Irenaeus, who would hold central places in his later theology. Following his ordination to the priesthood on the disposition of indiferencia, but the Exercises point him towards the obedience of Jesus as of essential importance to God’s self-revelation.

30 Barbarin, “Balthasar, Lyon, Irénée,” in Chrétiens dans la société actuelle, 45-75. Barbarin gives the best treatment of I have found of Balthasar’s time at Fourviere, in the archdiocese of Lyons. At the time of this essay, Barbarin was the archbishop of Lyons, and was attempting to distill the influence of the archdiocese on Balthasar’s thought through his connection with Fourviere and St. Irenaeus.

31 Both de Lubac and Erich Pryzwara are often erroneously identified as Balthasar’s teachers. However, Pryzwara was based in München, not Pullach, and at the time of Balthasar’s study at Fourviere, de Lubac was not allowed to teach. Balthasar’s associations with both figures were informal – with de Lubac, he and fellow students Henri Bouillard and Jean Danielou, among others, would study the Fathers with de Lubac (who generously offered his own notes) while other students played soccer. Peter Henrici notes that Balthasar did have good relationships with his actual professors, among them Johann Baptist Schuster, Maximilian Rast, Henri Vignon, and Henri Rondet, and even enlisted these old professors in an attempt to validate the mission of Adrienne von Speyr. See Henrici, Aspkete, 14-18, here 15.

32 Kevin Mongrain, The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval (New York: Herder and Herder, 2002). Mongrain ambitiously argues that Balthasar’s theology is fundamentally “Irenaean” in character. Although Balthasar shows clear debt to Irenaeus, this seems an over-reach. Quite simply, Irenaeus resonates with Balthasar’s thought in important ways, but it seems clear Balthasar is not attempting an “Irenaean” theology. If anything, the influences of Ignatius and Adrienne –
July 26, 1936 and completion of his studies, Balthasar worked alongside his mentor Erich Pryzwara in Münich, helping produce the Jesuit periodical Stimmen der Zeit. This would last for two years, at the conclusion of which Balthasar was given a choice of appointments: professor of theology at the Gregorianum in Rome\textsuperscript{33}, or chaplain to students in Basel.

Basel was the choice, and it was more momentous than Balthasar could know at the time. We can discern much of Balthasar’s character in this decision; he cherished no ambition for the accolades of scholarship, but saw himself fundamentally as a spiritual director. Karen Kilby, in her recent critique of Balthasar makes much of the fact that he was not a member of an academic faculty, and sees this as a detriment to his theology.\textsuperscript{34} However, apart from obvious flaws in her argument,\textsuperscript{35} one should realize that had Balthasar elected to serve in Rome, his theology would likely bare little resemblance to the corpus he left behind. This is not only because we would be dealing with a theologian the latter of which Mongrain is attempting to displace – are determinative of Balthasar’s theology. Barbarin shows a much more measured view, recognizing the resonances and great appreciation of Balthasar for Irenaeus, and that it can be fruitful to enter Balthasar’s theology from an Irenaean perspective. See Barbarin, “Balthasar, Lyon, Irénée,” 58-75.

\textsuperscript{33} Henrici, Aspkete, 18. The post was to found with other professors an institute for ecumenical theology. Henrici notes the institute has yet to come to fruition.

\textsuperscript{34} Karen Kilby, Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 39. “Someone who teaches in a university or a seminary typically works in relatively close proximity with colleagues who know more about a whole variety of things than he or she does...Balthasar throughout his writing career, had no such colleagues... Such a context must undoubtedly have been challenging, and must have required heroic levels of work and energy, but it was also a context in which there were no intellectual restraints from any side to affect what he wrote – no colleague or students to hold him intellectually accountable, no religious order to which he much answer, no publisher to raise a query.”

\textsuperscript{35} First, Kilby overlooks the fact that Balthasar did have serious conversation partners including Henri de Lubac, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Jean Danielou, Gustav Siewerth, Ferdinand Ulrich, and Peter Henrici to name just a few. Not only were these friends academic, few faculties either at Balthasar’s time or even that of Durham University (where Kilby is on faculty) could match the theological, historical, philosophical, and scriptural acumen of Balthasar’s friends. However, what is most striking about Kilby’s critique is her complete disregard of the basic history of Christian theology. The vast majority of the doctores ecclesiae did not labor as academics in the sense Kilby describes, and certainly not thinkers like St. Irenaeus, St. Augustine, or St. Maximus the Confessor.
with a very different disposition, but also because Balthasar would not have forged in Basel the two enduring friendships that would shape his life and thought in formative ways. First there was Karl Barth, whom Balthasar admired, engaged theologically, and desired to lead into the Catholic Church. Yet even more vital than the great giant of Reformed theology was the friendship with the unassuming physician of Basel, Dr. Adrienne von Speyr.

Von Speyr, referred to usually by her given name, had been raised Protestant, but had mystical experiences in her youth. In 1908, St. Ignatius of Loyola visited her, beginning a lifelong relationship between Adrienne and the founder of the Jesuits. During November 1917, she was granted a Marian apparition, after which she had a physical scar under her left breast. Beyond (yet also through) these experiences, Adrienne’s life was also profoundly marked by the theme of obedience. During a long period of illness, Adrienne was asked to give lectures at a convalescent home for girls, and for at least one address chose to speak on “Obedience and Freedom.” Similarly, a


37 Thomas Krenski, “Suggestion oder Transposition? Zur Problematik einer ‘theologischen Transkription’ der ‘experimentellen Dogmatik’ Adrienne von Speyrs,” in *Logik der Liebe*, 258-60; Michele M. Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology: Adrienne von Speyr & Hans Urs von Balthasar in Dialogue with Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 4-8. Schumacher succinctly addresses the contentious way that von Speyr has been treated by Balthasar scholars, and shows several interpreters (including Oakes) attempt to “isolate” Balthasar’s theology without influence from von Speyr because of discomforting passages in her works. She also helpfully points out part of the problem is a failure on many scholars’ part to truly read and engage von Speyr’s theology. Krenski provides a similar contextualization of German scholarship, for whom Balthasar’s relationship to Adrienne “made them all shake their heads in disbelief” (*Kopfschütteln machte mit Runde*) (259).

38 *OT*, 21.

Catholic friend once told her, “you are made for obedience,” perhaps referring to the intense pull Adrienne had begun to experience toward the Catholic Church. As a medical student, Adrienne became acutely aware of a desire to be obedient to God, but felt unable to do so without a proper community to support her. Adrienne’s greatest struggle with obedience came with the loss of her husband. Von Speyr met history professor Emil Dürr in 1927, and they were married soon thereafter. Balthasar reports that at first, Adrienne assented to marriage out of sympathy for Dürr and his children (Dürr was a widower and father of two), but came to love him dearly. So much so that Dürr’s sudden death in 1934 caused Adrienne great distress, even leading her to contemplate suicide. The situation was spiritually complex for von Speyr, because she had been given foreknowledge of his death. Afterwards, Balthasar notes a profound crisis in Adrienne’s life of prayer:

[S]he had discovered at the time of Emil’s death that in her prayer she really could no longer attest to complete sincerity in making the petition ‘Thy will be done’ in the Our Father. She had, to be sure, said yes to Emil’s death even before it happened, but later she had a growing feeling that this ‘yes’ had somehow been wrung from her, that she had not really given it to God in entire freedom. Because of her deep honesty, she stopped saying the Our Father; a Protestant minister had made the—ill-advised—suggestion that she substitute other prayers in place of the Lord’s Prayer. But in all these prayers she constantly encountered the unpronounceable word.

Near the time of this crisis, a mutual friend arranged a meeting between von Speyr and the youthful chaplain. During this meeting, Adrienne confessed she desired to become Catholic. Instead of theology, the conversation turned to prayer, which shows the

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40 FG, 25.
41 OT, 25.
42 FG, 29.
43 Ibid., 30-31.
theologian Balthasar truly was. Ultimately, Adrienne related her spiritual ailment, and Balthasar’s response had momentous effect. In his recollection, Balthasar instructed Adrienne that “our saying ‘Thy will be done’ does not mean we offer God what we are able to do ourselves, but rather we offer him our willingness to let what he does take over our lives and move us anywhere we will.”\(^{44}\) This answer caused a radical shift in Adrienne’s consideration of obedience. Obedience is not merely consent to this or that; it is an attitude of openness, of allowing oneself to be moved and directed by God. At gaining this insight, von Speyr felt her spiritual burdens lift almost immediately; in Balthasar’s words, “it was as though I had inadvertently touched a light switch that at one flick turned on all the lights in the hall.”\(^{45}\)

Soon after this meeting, Adrienne would enter into full communion with the Church on the feast of All Saints, 1940. Almost immediately, her spiritual experiences and visions intensified, with visitations coming from the Blessed Mother, St. Ignatius, and various other saints. The most decisive charismatic development would first appear in the spring of 1941. In a scene evocative of Luke 1:26-38, an angel appeared to Adrienne and prepared her for a new and terrifying mystical experience, and asked for Adrienne’s obedient consent to whatsoever God would give her. The angel was preparing von Speyr for the shocking gift of experientially entering into Christ’s passion, an experience “of the interior sufferings of Jesus in all their fullness and diversity.”\(^{46}\)

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 31.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 34.
We will see briefly how these mystical visions were vastly important for Balthasar’s Christological formulation, but first we must make mention an important qualification. In 1984, Balthasar wrote a report on the Community of St. John entitled *Unser Auftrag* (E.T. *Our Task*), or “our mission.” The first person plural possessive in one sense refers to the whole community and its raison d’être; in another, it refers to the fact that for Balthasar, he and Adrienne were not two commissioned individuals who happened to cooperate, but were both together called for a mission that encompassed the pair.

In general, Balthasar understood his role in the mission as a complement to Adrienne’s visions. In *Our Task*, he speaks of all his literary and theological training as preparation for this mission – against this, we can recall the earlier uncertainty as to what his studies would gain him. Again generally, Balthasar’s special task was to “situate what was special and what was new about Adrienne’s insights” into the Church’s spiritual

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47 As several scholars have noted, Adrienne’s theological corpus is unique from Balthasar’s though an important partnership (Adrienne dictated her theology to Balthasar, in fact). In this section, I am not attempting to draw out Adrienne’s theological approach *per se*, since it would require its own analysis and review of her works in depth. Rather I am interested in Balthasar’s perception of her theology, or the impact of his role in her experiences for his Christology. For a treatment of Adrienne’s published theology, the most comprehensive remains Barbara Albrecht, *Eine Theologie des Katholischen. Einführung in das Werk Adreinne von Speyrs* in two volumes (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972-73). The most comprehensive study in English is Matthew Lewis Sutton, *Heaven Opens: The Trinitarian Mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014). See also Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology* for a good engagement with Adrienne’s publications.

48 Mongrain, 12ff. Mongrain (in)famously claims that Balthasar was quite simply mistaken to think of his theology as so closely connected to that of Adrienne. See Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology*, 6-8 for rebuttal.

More specifically, however, Balthasar described his work in Christological terms: “Unlike some others, Adrienne’s mission was not only one of experience, of the dark night and other christological states, but also quite expressly one of interpretation. This is why a complementary mission was needed—to introduce and train her practically in the central christological mystery of the Son’s obedience to the Father.”

Aside from explicit evidence that Balthasar considered the Son’s obedience to be the central Christological mystery (no doubt stemming from his Ignatian-formed spiritual instincts), there is much more to attend to in this short sentence. First, it is imperative to grasp that Balthasar understood Adrienne’s visions as having to do with interpreting Christology – her visions are not for her alone, but a true charism in the Pauline sense that will serve the Church. Moreover, these experiences required a sound theological structure of Christological obedience.

Given that Adrienne would have experiences of the Passion every Holy Week from 1941 until her death in 1965, this is quite significant. For it means that throughout this 24-year period and indeed beyond, Balthasar’s spiritual guidance and partnership with Adrienne would give him cause to revisit and reflect continuously on the Christological mystery of the Son’s obedience, particularly as it was revealed in the Passion. Perhaps more importantly, the nature of Adrienne’s vocation meant that Balthasar’s work would take on the necessity of examining and better understanding the nature of Christ’s obedience as part of Christian doctrine and dogma. Hence, the co-

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50 OT, 17.

51 Ibid., 18-19. Emphasis mine.

mission with Adrienne meant that Balthasar would have to develop a theological account of Christ’s obedience, and the centrality of this theme was re-emphasized every single Holy Week.

One of Balthasar’s earliest works that shows a profound debt to Adrienne is the hymnic *The Heart of the World*, originally published in 1945. He called it “the first direct echo of my involvement with Adrienne’s Paschal experiences.” The “heart” here is that of Christ, and fundamentally concerns the Trinitarian foundation of hypostatic union. For Balthasar, the heart poured out for the world is also the heart of the Son in love and obedience to the Father, and these two aspects cannot be separated. In the midst of Adrienne’s visions and experiences, Balthasar writes passages such as the following, which shed light on our theme:

> But even this mystery [of existence] is taken up and contained within the space of a Heart. In its center Being and Non-Being encounter each other. It alone knows the secret of both knotting and the untying of the riddle. In its axis the beams cross. Every abyss is bridged by the impetus of his love. Every contradiction grows silent before his word of surrender. Such an undivided Heart is just as much God’s love become human as it is man’s love become divine. It is the perfect demonstration of the triune life of God and the perfect living out before God of a single-minded conviction. Distance and proximity coincide. The servant is a friend because he is a servant, and the friend is a servant because he is a friend. And nothing is confused or abolished, nor is any boundary violated by the vertigo of such infinities. Precise and clear and solid as crystal do the form and the contour remain, and what sin had scrambled together

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53 *Heart*, Balthasar described this book as “a sequence of hymns to Christ in rhythmical prose” (*My Work*, 15). At least two writers have argued this work is critical to understanding Balthasar’s theology (let alone his Christology), as it contains *in nuce* what will later become developed throughout his grand corpus; I tend to agree with their assessment. See Andrew Louth, “The Place of *Heart of the World* in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar” in *The Analogy of Beauty*, 147-63; and Wolfgang Klagholer-Treitler, “*Der Herz der Welt* – Mitte der Theologie Hans Urs von Balthasars” Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie 52 (2005): 613-27.

54 *OT*, 96. Interestingly, Lochbrunner argues that *The Heart of the World* represents a continuation of Balthasar’s Christological formation by St. Maximus the Confessor. In a sense, the text certainly is the “fruit of the cosmic Christology” developed in Balthasar’s book on Maximus” but it seems to me the work is *more* a fruit of the encounter with Adrienne’s spiritual charisms. See Lochbrunner, *Analogia Caritatis*, 30.
chaotically now becomes separated by the purity of obedience and reverence. Sober is the intoxication of this love, virginal the bridal bed of heaven and earth.\textsuperscript{55}

Here the fruit of Adrienne’s visions into Christ’s own life emerges. Balthasar is drawn not just to a social analogy of the Trinity taking love as its form (à la Richard of St. Victor) and not simply to Christ’s obedience. Rather, it is the circumincension of the two themes in the Heart of Jesus – at the foundation of this human life and obediential works is the Son’s eternal love for the Father. Service and friendship, obedience and love; they are mutual pairs, interpenetrating and fulfilling one another. Christ’s word of love is coextensive with his act of surrender, not only objectively, but subjectively in Balthasar’s mind. Hence, with Christ we deal not only with incarnate God, but incarnate love; in a development of John’s prologue, Balthasar writes of Christ, “He was Love, but no one suspected Love existed.”\textsuperscript{56}

We can see in this brief passage the remaining force of Ignatius. Christ shows the perfect life of “single-minded conviction” that Ignatius certainly intuits. Thus, Adrienne did not lead Balthasar into a new way of thought, but she occasioned the intensification of a theme. If for Ignatius, Jesus is both the cause and the model form of human life and election, Adrienne helped Balthasar emphasize the inimitable ground of this life in Triune love shown in Christ’s suffering for the world. In part, this is because Adrienne – who again, was visited by both St. Ignatius and the Blessed Mother – emphasized the Marian heart of election, wherein Mary’s Yes is a form of maternal love.\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[55] Heart, 54-55.
\item[56] Ibid., 59.
\item[57] Barbarin, Théologie et saintété, 28. “…for Adrienne, any spiritual path or the life of the Church begin entirely in “the light of yes,” the yes of believing in God, whose model remains the one who is called ‘Mother’…”
\end{footnotes}
Coupled with her experience of the Passion, Adrienne’s visions opened up for Balthasar the subjective aspect that the *Exercises* gesture toward: how Christ loves through his obedience and obeys in his love. Or, as Michele M. Schumacher writes, for Balthasar and Adrienne “obedience…points to the *relationality* of the divine person.”\(^{58}\) This point should not be under emphasized, since as Augustine made clear in *De Trinitate*, the Trinitarian proclamation is not according to God’s substance, but according to God’s relation to himself.\(^{59}\) Hence, Adrienne’s experiences and writings point Balthasar to Christ’s obedience as the point of interaction with the revelation of God’s self in the Triune relations. In this sense, her experiences are a fulfillment of the Ignatian vision of spirituality, and they clearly enabled Balthasar to focus more emphatically on the relation between Christ’s love and obedience.

There is one more part of the journey for which to provide an account. Adrienne’s impact would not be limited to her visions and Balthasar’s theological attempt to situate them. A decade after their meeting, Adrienne’s desire to found a secular society with Balthasar would give rise to what was undoubtedly the most difficult decision of his life, to leave the Society of Jesus. In some respects this event was Balthasar’s own “dark night of the soul.” And, as one might expect for such a spiritually conscious thinker, this struggle would also shape the later Christology of Balthasar’s career, and push him further to consider Christ’s love and obedience as a central theme.

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\(^{58}\) Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology*, 144.

\(^{59}\) Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V.6.
4. Balthasar as Founder: From the Society to the Community

In the 1955 summary of his work, Balthasar includes the following provocative paragraph:

For John [the Evangelist], the revelation of God in Christ is the Incarnation of the Word in this One, who is unique, loved, and adored; Ignatius appears to me as the point in history where the encounter of man with the God who is the Word and has the word, who addresses, chooses and calls, has become inescapable. In my view, all that is decisive takes place in the spiritual space that lies between the two poles of John and Ignatius.60

One cannot ignore the allusion to the Fourth Gospel evokes the spiritual structure of obedience. According to John, the Son “does nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (Jn 5:19); he comes to do the will of the one who sent him (6:38), connects his authority to the Father who bears witness for him (8:14-19); does nothing by his own authority, but teaches what the Father has spoken to him (8:28-29, 12:49); he acts to glorify the Father (14:13), and even at the chiming of his hour, he asks that he be glorified as Son so that the Father will be glorified (17:1-5). The “spiritual space” between Ignatius and John is permeated by obedience. Five years before this paragraph was written, Balthasar entered the tension of this spiritual space between the Ignatian and Johannine poles as he exited the Society of Jesus in order to co-found with Adrienne von Speyr the Community of St. John (Johannesgemeinschaft).

Balthasar’s decision to exit the order is troubling precisely because it seemed to countermand the vow of obedience he had taken, and that had been profoundly formative for him, as we have seen. However, it is important that Balthasar never understood his decision to depart the Jesuits as a renunciation of his vow or of his devotion to the Ignatian way. Rather, because of both his introduction to the spirituality of obedience

60 My Work, 20.
with the *Exercises* and its intensification in his work with Adrienne, Balthasar struggled mightily with his decision to leave the order. In retrospect, it seems that the process of this decision and the spiritual insights produced from this trial resulted in an even more intense conception of Christ’s love and obedience.

Typically, interpreters of Balthasar have undervalued the importance of the Community of St. John for his theology.\(^61\) This is striking given admissions such as the following from 1975:

> the activity of being a writer remains and will always remain, in the working-out of my life, a secondary function, something *faute de mieux*. At its center there is a completely different interest: the task of renewing the Church through the formation of new communities that unite the radical Christian life of conformity to the evangelical counsels of Jesus with existence in the midst of the world, whether by practicing secular professions of through the ministerial priesthood to give new life to living communities. All my activity as a writer is subordinated to this task; if authorship had to give way before the urgency of the task of which I have spoken, to me it would not seem as if anything had been lost; no, much would have been gained.\(^62\)

We can glean from this not only a priority of the secular community for Balthasar, but also intuit how this task inevitably permeates his life as author. Although he notes they are “completely different” this primarily means Balthasar does not write his theology explicitly for the purpose of founding secular communities, i.e., he does not write guides to founding such societies. However, this should not be taken to mean that Balthasar’s mission towards secular communities has no effect on his theology, which is at its root

\(^61\) The only examination of Balthasar’s theology of the secular institutes to appear in English has thus far been Juan M. Sara’s “Secular Institutes According to Hans Urs von Balthasar,” trans. Adrian Walker *Communio* 29 (Summer 2002): 309-36. To my knowledge, there have been only two studies of this theme, both still unpublished doctoral theses; see Daniela Morh, “Existenz im Herzen der Kirche. Zur Theologie der Säkularinstitute im Leben und Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars” (Würzburg, 2000); Paul Oberholzer, “Hans Urs von Balthasar und die Gesellschaft Jesu: der Briefwechsel zwischen Hans Urs von Balthasar und seinen Oberen, der unabhängigen Schweizer Vizeprovinz, aufbewahrt im Provinzarchiv der Schweizer Jesuiten” (Zürich, 2006).

\(^62\) *My Work*, 95.
about the encounter between God and the world. I have no plans here to fully detail the impact of the Community of St. John on Balthasar’s thought, but I emphasize its importance as a resource for understanding his Christological views.

The significance of the Community of St. John for this study surrounds its foundation. We can recall from above that von Speyr became Catholic in 1940 and immediately experienced a vast “cataract” of graces, including important visions and visitations. Before her first experience of the Passion in 1941, Adrienne received a Marian apparition, where the Blessed Mother advised her to commit herself to the guidance of young women and vocations, and Adrienne immediately began to think of a new community. In considering the nature of extant communities, Adrienne noted many young women are not fit for them, and ought not to enter a convent but “ought to leave the world for a period of recollection and spiritual formation and then return to the world at full strength.”

Between 1941 and 1945, Adrienne received numerous other visits by the Blessed Mother about “the Child,” the inchoate idea of this new community. The image of the Child is striking, for the birth of the community was not without pain and despair, and Adrienne at times considered abandoning the pursuit. Perhaps the decisive Marian vision Adrienne received was in October 1943, and it concerned an alternative version of Mary’s life, one in which she had “rejected the offer of God.” The absence of the child Jesus for Mary was “an emptiness…which became more and more unbearable.” In this vision, Adrienne recognized the choice for herself: either push through and found the community, or live with the emptiness.

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63 *OT*, 47.

64 Ibid., 53.
The vision is weighty, as it places the foundation of the Community of St. John in the form of Mary’s fiat, itself bound to the form of Christ’s obedience. Adrienne had to speak her own Marian Yes to the community and encounter the struggle of obedience on an existential level. Her Yes led to the unofficial founding of the community in late 1943, when von Speyr and Balthasar met with four women students and discussed the founding of the community and prayed the Suspice together\textsuperscript{65} – a clear sign once again that (Ignatian) obedience was a constant theme in Balthasar’s life. The official founding would come less than two years later, during a Balthasar-led practice of the Exercises on August 5, 1945.\textsuperscript{66}

Of course, the Marian character of the founding was not solely for Adrienne. Balthasar records that in spring of 1945, Adrienne had a vision of “the Child” but this time aided by priests. He recalls “it also became seriously clear at this time that I might eventually be forced to leave the Jesuits” as it would fall to him to gather in and lead the priests who would serve in the community.\textsuperscript{67} At this point, few could have blamed Balthasar for not carrying through with the community, for the Society of Jesus was not simply an organization; it was his spiritual home and family, his true brothers.

Increasingly, Balthasar became aware that saying Yes to the community with Adrienne would mean leaving the home of his father and his kinsmen, and going to a land the Lord would show him.

Balthasar’s dedication and love of the Society of Jesus is born out not least in his attempts to avoid this decision. In 1947 Balthasar visited Rome, and argued his case with

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 54.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 55.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
then Superior General John Janssens to pursue the founding of the Community of St. John with the blessing of the order.\textsuperscript{68} The sought-after approval did not come, and Balthasar faced the terrible decision he had anticipated at least 5 years earlier. Henri de Lubac, in his \textit{Mémoires sur l’occasion de mes écrits}, included a copy of the letter Balthasar wrote for his Swiss confrères in March 1950, explaining his decision.\textsuperscript{69} This letter is a testimony not only to the difficulty of Balthasar’s departure, but to the initiation into greater obedience he experienced in the decision.

Balthasar begins his missive by recounting a statement to Fr. Janssens in 1948. In the letter to Fr. Janssens, Balthasar said that after years of prayer and meditation, he arrived at a stark conclusion that God has elected him for a particular, personal task, and that “to shirk it or to turn a deaf ear to it would amount to betraying the love of God in the deepest part of myself.” Balthasar assured Fr. Janssens that if he had to ask for his release from his vows made upon entering the Society, it would not be to escape the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience so that he would “avoid submitting my mind and my will” in order to follow a personal plan. Rather, he would do so “with the clear awareness of binding myself to God and to our Father Ignatius by a still more strict obedience, which strips me still more severely of my liberty, in accordance with what [Jesus] said: When you have grown old, you will be led where you do not wish to go.”\textsuperscript{70}

Then Balthasar makes reassurances regarding possible other motivations to leave the Jesuits. He notes that his decision is both voluntary and involuntary. It is voluntary

\textsuperscript{68} Barbarin, \textit{Théologie et saintété}, 31. N.B.: Janssens was elected Superior General in 1946.

\textsuperscript{69} “Letter to Swiss Jesuit confrères” in Henri de Lubac, \textit{At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings}, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (Ignatius: San Francisco, 1993), 370-75. The letter is collected in the Appendix 8 of the translated edition, and is not given a title; “Letter to Swiss Jesuit confrères” is my own reference, and is not standardized.

\textsuperscript{70} “Letter to Swiss Jesuit confrères,” 370-71. The allusion is to John 21:18-19, see below.
because he wills to obey God in this particular mission; it is involuntary in that he had attempted to follow the call of God while remaining in the Jesuit order. He adds Fr. Janssens and those who judged his mission acted prudentially and pastorally, and Balthasar admits in the letter the difficulty of determining a private mission. As clear as these obstacles were, however,

…it became equally clear that, from the moment my business in Rome took the form of one alternative, either/or, it was lost, for me, within the Society. That form could have been avoided only if others besides me had recognized that the obedience owed to God and its founder by the Society does not have to contradict the obedience that one particular person may have to furnish God and Saint Ignatius, even if this obedience were once to become completely personal.  

There is much significance in these statements. First and foremost, the degree to which Balthasar explicitly states the crisis in terms of obedience is striking indeed. The intensity of the language shows to how Balthasar faced a spiritual trial that led him into the depths of obedience, and gave him the painful opportunity to understand obedience in several respects. Not least, Balthasar began to think ardently on the relationship between the vow of obedience in the religious life and the general obedience to God this vow is meant to augment. He perceived a great difference between abandoning one’s religious vows for the sake of a “change of heart” on the one hand, and asking for release for one’s vows because of a new mission on the other. Never did Balthasar surrender the link between the vow of obedience and the obedience to God, but saw that the necessary exercise of pastoral prudence can at times require an ad hoc distinction and disjunction between the two.

In all, it seems that for Balthasar the agony of obedience was not the submission of one’s will, but the fact of choice. One senses here not only an Ignatian spirit, but an

71 Ibid., 371.
Augustinian lament on Balthasar’s part. For the St. Augustine of *The Confessions*, temporal goods are harmonious with the eternal Good, but in the world as we experience it, we tend to love temporal goods in opposition to the eternal.\(^72\) Similarly, for Balthasar, the religious vow and obedience to God are in themselves perfectly harmonious, but on this side of heaven, these facets can seem juxtaposed. Of course, he places obedience to God above obedience to the order, but always as a lament of an obscured unity.

A second striking feature of the letter is Balthasar’s recognition that his response to his mission was coextensive with his love of God. Accepting this call was affirming love for God; to reject the call would have been to deny love for God in the depths of his soul. As we have intimated, Balthasar articulates this identity between love and obedience in Christ. Thus, his own spiritual crisis of the choice between the Jesuits or his mission with Adrienne is not personal in the private sense, but in the particular experience of being drawn into and participating in Christ. For Balthasar, the form of this crisis was Christologically inflected.

The allusion to the closing scenes of the Fourth Gospel intensifies this point. John 21:18 follows upon the reinstatement of Peter, and is followed by Peter’s questioning of what will happen to the Beloved Disciple. Peter being led where he will not wish to go has two fundamental aspects. First, Peter has chosen Christ, and now understands his love of Christ bound to service to his sheep. His being led where he will not wish occurs within and in consequence of his choosing to love and obey Christ. For Peter this means he will be led to his own crucifixion and hence will truly follow in the form of Christ’s

\(^{72}\) St. Augustine, *Confessions*, II.
death;\(^73\) and like Christ, he will not desire death, but desire the will of Him who sent him. Second, Peter’s call is not the shape of election as such – John will have a very different fate. It is the mission to which Peter is called, and its shape depends entirely upon the will and guidance of the Son (Jn 21:23).

At the end of his letter, Balthasar acknowledges his indebtedness to the Society. He likens it to a light that will “illumine the obscurity of the near or still distant future.” The two features of the letter treated above are thus incomplete without this third, Balthasar’s acknowledgment that he has no certainty of what lies ahead. There is but one solace: “But what joy and what peace on earth is greater than the awareness acquired in prayer that one has obeyed as well as one was able to understand.” Like Abraham, Balthasar felt the call to leave his own country, in ignorance as to what truly he would meet along the way. Yet he took succor in that, as much as he was able, Balthasar knew he was obedient to his call.\(^74\)

While Balthasar emphasized that he was not abandoning the way of Ignatius, it is also true that his Ignatian spirituality was brought into a different, explicitly Johannine spiritual space. On at least one front, this is seen in the patronage of the new community as well as the publishing house established to support it (Johannes Verlag), both dedicated to St. John the Evangelist. This focus on John reflects the intensification of the conception of Christ’s obedience that Balthasar found mediated through Ignatius. In an interview, Martha Gisi (one of the founding members of the community) remarked that

\(^73\) According to tradition, St. Peter refused to be crucified upright so that he would not be killed in the same way as Christ, out of humility. Yet this does not cancel out the point that Peter truly did follow into Christ’s form of life and death, even though he wished in his sanctity to emphasize his unworthiness to do so.

\(^74\) “Letter to Swiss Jesuit confrères,” 375.
what tied Balthasar, von Speyr, and Ignatius together was “the idea of obedience as following the obedient Christ.” She continues, “This is really the central idea. And when one speaks in this context about our community one can understand obedience only in the light of this theology: obedience as following the crucified Lord.”

The Johannine character of the community emphasized the ecclesial character of obedience to the obedient Christ. Cornelia Capol – another founding member and a long-time aide of Balthasar’s at Johannes Verlag – recalls it in this manner: “In our statutes, John is spoken of as the disappearing center between the hierarchical Church and the Church of love. . . . John is there at the moment of the Cross—and nevertheless another occupies the highest place at a later time. This is what we desire as a characteristic of the Community of St. John: the ability to disappear into the Church.” By this “disappearing” Capol means the Johannine spirit of love (Jn 13-17) that stands at the center of the Petrine and Marian dimensions of the Church. It is in this sense, a working out of the disciples’ fruit in the world that comes as a result of their abiding in Christ (Jn 15:5-6).

With the Community of St. John, then, we have to do not only with Balthasar’s mission to form a secular society, but also the real embodiment of Johannine theology, guided as always by the vision of Ignatius. For the purposes of this dissertation, this step is of vital importance, since Balthasar was indeed the leader of the Community of St. John as spiritual director and theological guide. From 1950 to his death in 1988, he daily was concerned with how people serving in secular professions or priests called to assist them,

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76 Ibid.
were to embody being obedient to the obedient Christ. Consequently, over these last 38 years – during which he would write all but one volume of his vaunted trilogy (TL 1 being the exception) – Balthasar theologized as one living out an explicitly Johannine (and Ignatian) conformity to the obedient Son.

In the opening sections of the general directives for the community, Balthasar lays out the Christological principle of the endeavor. He evokes one of his cherished maxims, that Christology and Trinitarian theology are inextricable: “It is, of course Jesus Christ who is the center of our faith, but only the Christ who is the Father’s Son, endowed with the fullness of the Spirit, the Christ to whom the Bible bears witness.”\(^77\) The redemptive nature of Christ, he affirms, is only due to the Trinitarian foundation; Balthasar emphasizes we must recognize we speak of the Son of the Father.

Then Balthasar recalls that the plan of redemption, grounded in the Triune love of God, gives itself in the sacramental life of the Church, i.e., Christ gives himself and his Spirit to the Church. To this, Balthasar adds, “the Son accomplished the work of our redemption through an unfailing obedience of humility and love which went as far as the Godforsakenness of the Cross. It is inconceivable, therefore, that he would give himself to the Church without imparting to her his own attitude, both trinitarian and incarnate, to be the source of his members’ unity in him and by him.”\(^78\) This move is vastly important, for we now truly see the impact of the words of Ms. Capol regarding the community as this “disappearing unity” of the Church. In the Johannine motif of Christological glory, the Son desires only to glorify the Father rather than be glorified. The Son’s obedience is such that he seeks to “disappear” and in this is glorified. It is this obedient center that for

\(^77\) *OT*, 122.

\(^78\) Ibid., 123.
Balthasar marks the relationship between Christ and his disciples. The gift of participating in Christ is precisely here at the imparting of Christ’s trinitarian and incarnate disposition of loving obedience to the members of the Church.

This shows that Balthasar saw the Community of St. John – and indeed his own daily life – as the living out of this contact point between Christ and his members. It was, in other words, a continual return to the central mystery of Christ’s loving obedience, which in Balthasar’s mind made the way of life of the Community of St. John both possible and fruitful. It is true that Balthasar’s long occupation with the Community of St. John did not result in explicit theological programs about secular communities or popular books about the practical matters of founding communities. But this does not mean the community was unimportant for Balthasar’s theology, precisely because the community directed him not toward itself, but to reflection on the life and work of Christ.

5. **Conclusion: Balthasar the Theologian**

In this chapter I have labored to demonstrate that Balthasar’s theology is clearly impacted by his spiritual experiences and contexts. The thrust of the foregoing is that it is impossible to fully understand or appreciate Balthasar’s treatment of Christ’s love and obedience without considering how Balthasar encountered this love and obedience. Mediated through his life with the Jesuits, his partnership with Adrienne, and his co-founding of the Community of St. John, Balthasar undertook a life-long curriculum of Christological discovery centered on the mystery of Christ’s love and obedience.

With this foundation, we are now well prepared to analyze Balthasar’s major works and see the theme of Christ’s love and obedience he develops. Yet, there is one final note to make. Peter Henrici states that Balthasar had long desired to write a book on
obedience, but it never materialized.\textsuperscript{79} If I might take the liberty to hazard a guess as to why, it was very likely impossible for Balthasar to have written one volume on this theme. For Balthasar, obedience was not simply one doctrine among others; it was the fundamental language of the incarnation, both God’s word to man and the possibility of man’s answer to God. It seems Balthasar was occupied by entering into this mystery, returning continuously to it throughout his \textit{oeuvre}. To explore this theme in its fullness, or at least to the extent that Balthasar understood it could never be explained in one volume. Instead, it required an entire lifetime of reflection and devotion.

Here we touch upon a fitting end to a chapter informed by Balthasar’s life: his death. As his friends have often reminded us, Balthasar was to be elevated to cardinal by Pope John Paul II, but died two days before the ceremony on June 26, 1988. Cardinal Ratzinger gave the homily at his funeral,\textsuperscript{80} and Balthasar would rise to prominence (and criticism) in Catholic theology on the wings of the two pontiffs’ approbation of his work. Yet an oft-neglected aspect of his death is pertinent for our theme. Balthasar died in the morning, fittingly enough, as he prepared to celebrate Mass. Henrici writes, “Like his father, St. Ignatius, he was alone and unnoticed.”\textsuperscript{81} The cultural polymath of de Lubac’s memory had thus “disappeared” into the Church, no doubt the sort of death he desired.

As Balthasar was found in the sleep of death, lying on his desk was a finished manuscript, meant as a Christmas gift to his friends. This book would be published and

\textsuperscript{79} Henrici, “A Sketch,” 34.


\textsuperscript{81} Henrici, “A Sketch,” 41.
bears the English title *Unless You Become Like This Child*. Small but profound, *Unless You Become Like This Child* testifies to Balthasar’s lifelong occupation with Christ’s love and obedience. The work begins with beautiful explorations of human childhood, building up to the examination of the archetype of the attitude of the child, that of Christ Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father. Balthasar’s vast spiritual engagements with God prove that it is truly this gift that Balthasar wished to give his friends – not merely another book, but an encounter with the obedient Son, who calls all to be like him as he invites us to be his and in him.

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82 See Ibid, 42.
CHAPTER 3

ARCHETYPAL OBEDIENCE: BALTHASAR’S CONCEPTION OF CHRIST’S FILIAL OBEDIENCE AS ARCHETYPAL EXPERIENCE

1. Introduction

The first major point of departure for Balthasar on Christ’s obedience is his reflection on Christ as the “absolute singularity” that impacts all others. First developed early on in *A Theology of History* (1952), this theme becomes a major component of the theological aesthetics, published 1961-69. In this chapter, I examine this emphasis primarily through the final volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*, focused on the Old and New Covenants, as a means of organizing Balthasar’s reflections. Drawing formally upon Balthasar’s approach to Christ’s “archetypal experience,” my thesis is that Balthasar develops Christ’s obedience as uniquely filial, and for that reason, archetypal for

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1 Arregui; Oakes, “Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-88): The Wave and the Sea,” *Theology Today* 62 (2005): 364-74; Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, Angel Cordovilla Perez, “La novedad de Cristo y su significación universal,” *Revista Española de Teología* 65 (2005): 549-80; Raymond Gawronski, “Only the Unique Really Dies: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Uniqueness of the Word,” *Communio* 21 (Fall 1994): 526-37; Gawronski, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995). In general, each of these scholars locates Balthasar’s understanding of Christ’s uniqueness within the matrix of world religions and the relation to Christianity. While I do not explicitly focus on this topic, it is informative for my own thesis. Quite simply, I argue Balthasar finds Christ and thus the Church is unique because it is decidedly not merely the expression of the religious virtue of piety or obedience to the divine one. These virtues can be respected and are invaluable, but Christ’s obedience is bound to the reality of the hypostatic union.

Of these efforts, I owe most to Oakes, whose attention to the theme of Christ as “the wave and the sea” has greatly informed my argument. Oakes emphasizes the normativity of Christ is also historically mediated: Christ is both one wave among others and the sea that allows waves to be. Hence Christ is the “absolutely singular.” My approach in this chapter is fundamentally a working out of the obediential aspect of Balthasar’s understanding of Christ in this manner.
Christian obedience. Christ’s filial obedience is juxtaposed to two other forms, creaturely and covenantal.

At the heart of this juxtaposition lies the relationship in Christ between love and obedience. Balthasar sees filial obedience as the perfect aesthetic “attunement” (Übereinstimmung) of love and obedience to each other\(^2\) – for Christ as the eternal Son, to be obedient to the Father and to love the Father are coextensive, and for all intents and purposes, identical. Conversely, obedience simply as a creaturely capacity or as a feature of the covenantal relationship are not “archetypal” because the relationship between love and obedience in these forms lacks the perfect attunement. Christian life is then participation in this loving openness of Christ to God and is not simply the valorization of religious capacities of the human person. Rather, Christian discipleship is a radical re-location of these capacities within the filial life of the Incarnate Son.\(^3\)

The chapter develops in three movements. First, I discuss the category of “archetypal experience” as Balthasar explains it in the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord* in order to provide a structure for what follows. Second, I lay out the two forms of obedience that are not archetypal, those appropriate to the creature as such and the covenant. With these forms, I mean respectively that kind of obedience that the creature can give to God based on its natural powers *qua* created being, and that form Israel gives to God in the structure of the covenant. The third section describes Christ’s filial

\(^2\) Marchesi, *La cristologia di Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 18-19. My argument here has much in common with Marchesi’s attention to Balthasar’s Christological use of “proportion and harmony.” As Marchesi notes, these concepts indicate Balthasar’s musical background and should be interpreted in this light.

\(^3\) *TH*, 47. In this earlier work, Balthasar argues that Christian eschatology is not properly a desire to escape history, but an openness in love and hope to receive from God. Because developing the full schema of history Balthasar possesses in *TH* would require a rich exposition of his engagement with both Patristic sources (esp. St. Maximus the Confessor) and Hegel, I have elected to focus on the aesthetic version of this claim.
obedience, and how Balthasar understands this as archetypal for Christian life. For Balthasar, the upshot is that Christian obedience is fundamentally a participation in Christ’s filial obedience, and thus *filial* obedience identifies the norm of Christian life.

2. Archetypal Experience in Balthasar

The theological aesthetics as a whole is built around the communication of divine glory to the creature. As many have noted, the primary role of Christology in this schema is as the “Figure” of Revelation. Christ is the objective appearance of God’s self-revelation, the ultimate form (*Gestalt*) that gives meaning and coherence in the landscape of revelation. Yet Balthasar emphasizes is that this figure is not merely objective. Christ does not only display God’s self-revelation in a symbolic or forensic manner, of pointing “beyond” himself. Christ reveals the divine by pointing “within” himself. Jesus is not the sheet music, the conductor, nor the soloist: he is the symphony of revelation in himself.  

Balthasar’s archetypal experience protects the full nature of this communication that takes place in Christ’s person. Jesus’ consciousness or experience is as much part of the structure of revelation as his acts or deeds. Or, to state this in a configuration that is popular among Balthasar scholars, Christ is the *Gestalt* of both *fides qua* and *fides quae*. Consequently, the immediate context of archetypal experience is Balthasar’s warning against neglecting the structure of biblical revelation by means of historical or eschatological subversion. With regard to the former, Balthasar echoes St. Irenaeus in rejecting a Gnostic approach, attributing revelation to intermediary beings alone rather

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5 See, e.g. Larry S. Chapp, *The God Who Speaks: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology of Revelation* (San Francisco, CA: International Scholars, 1997), 139ff.; This configuration – which is original to Balthasar – is in a sense problematic because it emphasizes the question of whether or not Christ possessed faith, which Balthasar argues he did. The problem arises in too narrowly defining the archetypal experience in the language of faith.
than God himself.\textsuperscript{6} In the Incarnation, God himself entered history and so Balthasar clarifies that the authentic encounter with divine glory is structured upon God’s own agency toward creation.

A second and more complicated danger lies in considering the Incarnation as a \textit{merely} historical moment that is eschatologically surpassed. Balthasar rejects as foreign to revelation any sense that the Christo-form economy is “in the end something only preliminary which must finally be transcended by either a mystical or an eschatologically-celestial immediacy that would surpass and make superfluous the form of salvation, or, put concretely, the humanity of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{7} In the eschatological term, Balthasar essentially means there is no \textit{telos} of participation in God that is unmediated through the Incarnate form of the Son.

In this two-fold caveat, Balthasar establishes the Incarnation as the principle in the great paradox of revelation, that in God the imperceptible becomes perceivable. Balthasar emphasizes that in the Incarnation God not only enters the world, but “becomes world”: “[God’s] allowing us to participate in his Godhead, which is above the world, precisely in [the Incarnation] and in no other way, occurs not in a second process, but in

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{GL I}, 294.

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{GL I}, 294; Nicholas J. Healy, \textit{The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar}, 163-79. The argument against an “eschatologi-celestial immediacy” appeals to the complications surrounding the beatific vision. Healy, following A.N. Williams to a degree, highlights the issue as it appears in the theologies of Aquinas (the beatific vision is mediated through the created grace of \textit{lumen gloriae}) and Palamas (the beatific vision is mediated through the uncreated divine energies). Healy argues that Balthasar recognizes that the problem is ontological and Christological: how can a creature receive the mediation of knowing God’s essence while remaining itself. For this reason, the only true resolution can lie in the hypostatic union in which the natures are united within their difference. Following this, we can see why Balthasar insists on this point: Christ is the form and content of the beatific vision, and he cannot be surpassed by any other form of mediation without dissolving either the union or the difference inherent to the beatific vision.
the one and only process.” Here, Balthasar points to Hebrews 1:2-3, from which he reads together the epistle’s description of Christ as both “inheritor of all things” (haeredem universorum) and the “radiance of the Father’s splendor, and full expression of his being” (qui cum sit splendor gloriae, et figura substantiae ejus). A second reference is made to Revelation 1:8, Christ as the Alpha and Omega. Balthasar interprets this not only in terms of finite history, but also in light of John 1: Christ is the first and final logos of God to humanity, a word not superseded in any respect.

The upshot of this is not only is God’s encounter with humanity always in the idiom of the Incarnation – even proleptically in the Old Testament – so also is humanity’s encounter with God. Thus for Balthasar Christ is “absolutely, the form of the encounter between God and man.” Yet, since Christ is this encounter in the form of God and the form of total man, Christ both mediates the encounter with God in its entirety and also is this encounter. Consequently, Balthasar finds that “Christ, the full and perfect man, has in his own totality the experience of what God is.”

Notably, Balthasar formulates that Christ is the experience of God, rather than merely having an experience with God. Christ is the perfection of humanity’s encounter with God, being the drama between God and man as the creator intended. Simultaneously, this encounter occurs in union with the Logos; it is expressive of God’s “encounter” with himself in the Triune life. This paradox is the immediate ground of Balthasar’s “archetypal experience.” Christ’s experience is archetypal first because he is the archetype that all other human encounters with God must imitate. Yet he is also true arche-typos, the unique source and foundation of a form of life, and not one type among

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8 GL 1, 294.

9 Ibid., 296.
others. According to Balthasar, Christ is thus both “the inimitable and what must be imitated.”  

While Balthasar in no way wishes to dissolve this paradox, he argues that, as archetype, Christ “determines” (*bestimmen*) the human encounter of God in at least three ways. First, he determines both his attitude toward God and the faith of his disciples; second, he determines the Christian faith both for the Church and for the Old Testament; and third, he determines the experience of God in the “Old and New Aeons.” In a different formulation, this “determination” is called providing the “measure.”

There are, then, several levels of archetype at work. On a metaphysical level, there is a certain Platonic Idealism in play in the sense that Christ is the ideal form that gives life and measure to particular instances of the encounter with God. However, Balthasar also emphasizes the diachronic element. Christ is not merely the ideal in which we participate, He is the unique historical concrete that has real impact upon all historical reality.

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10 Ibid., 296.

11 Edward T. Oakes, *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011. Oakes, in keeping with Balthasar’s theological perspective, emphasizes that Christian paradoxes are approached in both wonder and desire to understand; thus they are not “solved” or moved beyond, but understood so that the Christian can live within them.

12 Junius Johnson, *Christ and Metaphysics*; Noel O’Donoghue, “A Theology of Beauty” in *The Analogy of Beauty*, 1-10. Johnson argues Balthasar’s theology is so profoundly shaped by his Platonism, it actually guides his preference of St. Bonaventure to St. Thomas. This is a positive version of an old critique that Balthasar is fundamentally simply a Platonist – for an older response to these fashionable critiques, see O’Donoghue. Certainly Balthasar does possess a deep debt to Platonic thought, but this is as much tied to his recovery of the Fathers as it is his own philosophical proclivities – indeed, it is difficult to drink deeply from the well of Origen, Augustine and Dionysius without imbibing Platonism (and Neo-Platonism). However, several studies have shown that Balthasar is unique enough philosophically to justify thinking of his philosophy in its own right, and not merely as Platonism (though, of course, indebted to Balthasar’s friendships with Ferdinand Ulrich and Gustav Siewerth). See, *inter al.* Pascal Ide, *Être et mystère: La philosophie de Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Bruxelles: Culture et Vérité, 1995) and D. C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham, 2004).
The importance of the diachronic element of Balthasar’s structure cannot be overstated. On the one hand, as several commentators have noted, Balthasar’s historical stress involves his commitment to the concrete form of biblical revelation. More importantly, it secures that the archetypal nature of Christ’s experience with God is historically mediated – Christ takes time into himself. This is primarily in Christ’s life, death, descent, and resurrection, but also in the form of his ecclesial body. Hence the Church’s imitation of Christ’s archetypal experience is not mimesis of Christ alone, but also involves faith in Christ, which is itself imitative of the apostolic experience. For Balthasar, Christ’s experience is archetypal but is not merely a model; it is something that is mediated and cannot be taken in or understood apart from this mediation.

Christ’s concrete mediation of his experience of God maintains the proper relationship between natural faculties of the human person and the grace of revelation that reconfigures and re-forms them in the encounter with God. Peter Casarella has demonstrated that Balthasar sees experience (Erfahrung) as naturally grounded in the relation between the expressive image and the reception of the image, or kenotic love. However, he stresses that Balthasar thinks these foundations “demand an ever more expressive christological concentration” if they are to participate in the drama of

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15 *GL 1*, 298.
revelation. In the words of Michel Messier, Balthasar’s conception of archetypal experience strives to correct “objective christologies” in which “it is the world that is the condition of the possibility of Christ” and “subjective Christologies” in which “it is man who is the condition for the possibility of Christ.”17 Rather, it is Christ who is the condition for the possibility of the experience of God that is communicated in and constitutive of Christian discipleship.

Three salient features of Balthasar’s approach to archetypal experience are especially relevant to our purposes of understanding his treatment of Christ’s filial obedience. First, the Incarnation is the absolute norm of the encounter of God and man, or the Creator and creation. Since this form is in essence obediential, it means that Christ’s filial obedience is the norm and measure of theo-drama. Second, Christ as archetype of obedience does not mean he merely provides the model of filial obedience, but rather he is filial obedience to the Father. I.e., Christ’s filial obedience is unique and inimitable, yet also the form that must be imitated if we are to be, as St. John teaches, “sons of God” (1 John 3:1). Third, Christ’s filial obedience is normative and archetypal inasmuch as it is mediated, participated in, and determinative of the ecclesially located encounter with God.

3.1 Non-Archetypal Experience 1: Creaturely Obedience in Balthasar

Before we can appreciate Balthasar’s understanding of Christ’s filial obedience and its role in his construct of archetypal experience, we must first treat those forms of


obedience to which Christ’s is contrasted. First is Balthasar’s approach to what I call “creaturely obedience,” i.e., the obedience the creature can give to God based on his or her natural capacities alone. My presentation here emphasizes Balthasar’s attention to the ontological complications of the creature’s natural obedience. Quite simply, the creaturely encounter with God qua creature is pervaded by the fact of the creature’s finitude. For Balthasar, this means that the creature’s obedience on the natural level cannot be normative for Christian discipleship, but must be re-formed in the encounter with Christ.

Throughout *GL*, Balthasar develops a notion of creaturely obedience in terms of perception (*Wahrnehmung*), which is inherently ontological. *Wahrnehmung* is derived from *nehmen* (“to take”) and *wahr* (“true”), showing truth is received from outside of the perceiver and is not created by her. Balthasar emphasizes the reception of truth by means of a figural manifestation that stands over-against the perceiver, i.e., with a form

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18 This terminology does appear in *GL* 7, however it is not taken as systematically as I present it here. Rather I am appropriating it as part of an implicit taxonomy of obedience present in Balthasar’s work.

19 Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology*, 112-26. Schumacher helps clarify that even though Balthasar argued strongly for graced nature so that human fulfillment is in serving, praising, and loving God, this does not mean he thought humans were fulfilled simply by exercising native capacities. Rather, in Schumacher’s words, for Balthasar faith “remains a theological virtue, not to be confused with the natural disposition of the human person” (177). The importance in this presentation is that according to Balthasar, creaturely obedience as such need the “infusion” of Christ’s love and obedience to rise to the fact of Christian life. This is neither an antithesis nor negation of the natural creaturely capacities, but rather it is their fulfillment.

20 Arregui, 52. Arregui speaks of the Christian relationship to world religions as one of integration into Christ. Working through Balthasar’s Christology, he argues this ground has it place in Christ’s assumption of man’s religious faculties; I wish to emphasize that though this is true, Balthasar also saw the fact that the Incarnate Son takes up these capacities means he does not simply valorize them, but reconfigures them.

21 D.C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*,163-254. Schindler emphasizes that in Balthasar’s view of *Gestalt*, truth is a result of the dramatic encounter of the knower and known, of which truth is the resultant and transcending “third.” However, Schindler is of course emphasizing the epistemology of intra-mundane truth in Balthasar following his interpretation of Goethe, rather than the perception of divine truth (glory). The concept of *wahrnehmen* in the theological aesthetics is geared toward a theological rather than merely philosophical phenomenology.
and structure that the perceiver must encounter and over which she exerts no control or
direction. Put aesthetically, the encounter with the beautiful (which communicates truth)
leads the perceiver to recognize the beautiful as something external to him, and its truth is
thus grasped and received.\textsuperscript{22} Especially with revealed truth, the divine form that is
perceived in God’s self-communication cannot be circumvented or overcome. Rather, it
is accepted, received, and requires a response of openness.\textsuperscript{23}

Early on in \textit{GL}, Balthasar acknowledges that the encounter with the beautiful is
for this reason appropriately understood in terms of obedience. In the drama of
revelation, faith essentially means that the entirety of the person is made “a space that
responds to the divine content.”\textsuperscript{24} Just as Michelangelo saw his sculpture as freeing the
image already inside, so too do human beings necessarily obey the form of divine beauty
and truth as it comes to them.\textsuperscript{25} However, there is a fundamental character to this
obedience that prevents it from being archetypal, namely that it is bound to the
ontological \textit{maior dissimilitudo} obtaining between God and humanity.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{l}
\textsuperscript{22} The externality of truth is for Balthasar the sense of outside one’s own self-consciousness, not 
outside one’s self as such. Hence, I can recognize truth in myself, but perceiving this truth is also to 
recognize that I did not make myself nor am I the principle of what truth I find within. This truth points to 
an external principle, or at least one that is at some point far beyond.
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\textsuperscript{23} Anneliese Meis, “\textit{Analogia donationis, la theologia de lo absolute en la obra de Hans Urs von 
Balthasar},” \textit{Teologia y Vida} XLIX (2008): 157-92. Meis helpfully shows that for Balthasar, the movement 
from non-being into being is at all times marked as gift. To Balthasar, the fundamental question of “why is 
there something rather than nothing” is an appreciation of the” something” of being in it gift quality. Thus 
the reception of revelation, and the function of obedience therein is co-extensive with creaturely ontology.
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\textsuperscript{24} \textit{GL I}, 214.
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\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 214-15.
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\textsuperscript{26} Holzer, “<Analogia Entis>. Holzer demonstrates that Balthasar’s understanding of the \textit{analogia 
entis} is not a mere philosophical construct for Balthasar, but he sees it unfolding through the Old Covenant.
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In general, Balthasar’s approach emphasizes that the beauty of God (gloria) maintains the mysterious nature of this glory as wholly other. In Israel’s primal encounters with YHWH, Balthasar emphasizes the ontological nature of kabod, the Hebrew term for glory. The term refers to the “weightiness” of a thing, which Balthasar defines as expressing, “everything which gives any living being, especially man, an external force or impetus (gravitas) that makes it appear imposing.” Kabod refers to the somewhat numinous experience of encountering another who radiates with an inescapable testimony to the power or standing of her being. With God’s kabod, this “weightiness” can only be described in terms of God’s perfection, holiness, and his complete utter difference from creation. As Balthasar states, “God’s kabod is inseparable from his particular ‘holiness,’ from the ‘might’ of his spiritual actions, from the manifestation of his ‘name,’ from the turning of his ‘countenance’ to man.”

Kabod establishes the contours of the encounter with God’s glory, which is in turn “precisely what constitutes the distinctive property of God, that which for all eternity

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27 Indeed, Balthasar argues that the term gloria itself moves in this direction and is key to preventing his own theology from becoming an “aesthetic theology.” Gloria underscores the analogical relationship between the divine beauty and worldly beauty, such that the former will establish in itself the principles or its perception and intelligibility that cannot be simply transferred from the latter. See GL 1, 77-114.


29 GL 6, 33.

30 Marchesi, La cristologia trinitaria di Hans Urs von Balthasar, 310-13. Marchesi’s discussion of Balthasar’s use of kabod situates it within the complications of the analogical attribution of sensibility to God that kbd suggests and is helpful background.

31 GL 6, 35.
distinguishes him from all that is not God.” As such, divine glory has a double-edge for the perceiver: “to have an inkling of the divine, to adore it from afar, to learn to be silent before it and to allow it to hold sway: this may be granted to creatures at their very limits.” Experiencing divine glory awakens the perceiver to an indomitable realization of the holiness of the glorious one, wherein the creature experiences the weight of God’s kabod at the farthest ends of human quiddity. Here, as the creature comes into contact with holiness, it becomes awakened to the meanest ontological fact: God is God, and I am not.

The ontological contours of the encounter are enough to inform the creature as to the proper response she must offer to God: only obedience will do. But it also simultaneously reveals how creaturely obedience, while good and just in its own right, cannot be archetypal for Christian life. In Love Alone is Credible Balthasar writes, “When man encounters the love of God in Christ, not only does he experience what genuine love is, but he is also confronted with the undeniable fact that he, a selfish sinner, does not himself possess true love.” By this, Balthasar means that what the finite, creaturely life establishes limits on love itself – the acknowledgment and fear of finitude creates enmity, strife, and leads to the “failures of love.” From this, the creature’s encounter with God leads to the recognition of the necessary response of obedience.

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32 Ibid., 10
33 Ibid., 31.
34 Beaudin, 74. Beaudin emphasizes that for Balthasar, God’s kabod communicates his “abstract splendor” that through the covenant is made more “concrete” while at the same time remaining splendor precisely as “incomprehensible grace, fidelity, and love.”
35 LAC, 61.
precisely where the creature’s capacity for love is threatened, i.e., at the encounter with human finitude.

Consequently in the creature as such, love and obedience are not mutually informing, but are often mutually exclusive. In his exploration of the commandment to love God and neighbor, Balthasar recognizes that this mandate cannot be derived from the human capacities to love. There is “one thing God will not do: He will not accommodate his great commandment to our human insufficiency. For he knows there is only one thing that love cannot endure: to have limits set to it. Love cannot survive unless it is active; if its activity is constrained, it withers and dies. Love has its origin in God, who is eternal and boundless life.”

37 God’s infinity and limitless is coextensive with Deus caritas est. For the creature, however, his own finitude limits the movement of love and it is precisely at this encounter with finitude that the creature understands obedience to God to begin.

This leads to the important insight that the creature’s obedience to God is not necessarily and often is unconnected the experience of God as Love. Although the creature may through contemplation recognize the Wholly Other, this does not guarantee that the creature will give the Creator the particular obedience that is due to Him. Balthasar admits, “creatures learn something like piety – a sense of awe before the undecipherable Meaning that pervades and directs even the apparent meaninglessness of their existence.”

38 Yet at the same time, the peril of idolatry is ever-present, and stems from the human desire to surpass his limits. Thus idolatry, under Balthasar’s schema, shows how creaturely obedience needs to be established in love, but cannot establish this

37 CSL, 27.

38 GL 6, 31.
love itself. Because the creature finds its limits in the encounter with divine love, the love it returns becomes solipsistic, not a genuine receiving of the Other, but a mechanism to imagine bursting the bonds of finitude. Hence, creaturely obedience does not show the “naturalness” of the interpenetration of love and obedience, but rather threatens to put them in dialectical juxtaposition.

3.2 Non-Archetypal Experience 2: Covenantal Obedience in Balthasar

In The Christian State of Life, Balthasar distinguishes between the law of love and the law of duty, between choice and obligation. The difference between the two laws is not one of content, but of aesthetic proportion and coherence. The law of duty and realm of obligation perceives individual commandments as fragmentary pieces, whose unity remains elusive. This fragmentary perception stems from duty’s displacement from the distance from the center of love. All the commandments of God’s ethical law are part of his law of love, and the one who exists at this center of love of God will live out the obliged laws, but as an act of love. The law of duty, however, makes the commands seem onerous, because it is at a significant remove from the center of love that gives the commandments proportion, coherence, and formal (gestaltlich) unity.\(^{39}\)

The sphere of duty thus has two fundamental characteristics: it is a place of fractals and fragments, of individual aspects blind to their unifying principle, and it is a place of commandment, where the law is perceived as an obligation rather than an expression of the center of one’s being. This double nature of duty aligns with

\(^{39}\) CSL, 32-40.
Balthasar’s understanding of how obedience functions within the covenant. For Balthasar, the covenant will be transcended and re-established by the new covenant of Jesus Christ, and as such the obedience functioning there is not archetypal for Christian experience. This is because the obedience of the covenant functions as an expression of obligation and, perhaps more importantly, the self-distancing fragmentary perception of the commandments that will be reconfigured in Christ.

Balthasar argues that the covenant is based inexorably on God’s free election of Israel in love. He explicitly rejects any configuration by which we might claim the covenant is founded (a) in Israel’s groping for God, or (b) in the mutual grasping of Israel and God for one another. Rather, the mutuality of the covenant can only be founded on God’s electing love. Hence, the covenant comes to Israel in a particular form of mutuality: “word and answer, love and answering love, directive and obedience.”

Unlike the creature simpliciter, Israel is awakened to an identification of YHWH, the

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40 W.T. Dickens, Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theological Aesthetics: A Model for Post-Critical Biblical Interpretation (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 126. Dickens rightly notes that the theme of fragmentation is key to Balthasar’s understanding of how the New Testament unites with the Old Testament through fulfilling it. Dickens describes this fragmentation as “the mutual irreconcilability of [the Old Testament’s] various conceptions of both the covenant’s fulfillment and the means by which that fulfillment is to be effected.”

41 Richard Schenk, OP “What does Trinity ‘Add’ to the Reality of the Covenant” in Love Along is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 105-13. Schenk distinguishes Balthasar’s approach to the Old Covenant from that of Adolf von Harnack: where Harnack finds the OT “unfitting in principle for New Testament sensibilities,” Balthasar thinks God’s glory is genuinely revealed therein (109). This is a helpful reminder that Balthasar does not think the Old Covenant is deficient in content. Rather, his conviction is that the content of the Old Covenant belongs to and in Christ, and thus awaits its fullness in the New Covenant.

42 Dickens, 127. “The Old Testament remains formless on its own terms. There is no integrating form that would draw all the disparate elements into a comprehensive unity. . . . Thus, on Balthasar’s view, the Israelites and Judeans were inspired by God to fashion the elements of a transcendent form that they could not perceive by means of those elements. When evaluated on Christian presuppositions, the Old Testament’s forms are merely ‘formal’, that is, they await the transcendent ‘material’ that God’s trinitarian self-revelation in Jesus Christ provides.”

43 GL 6, 149-50.

44 Ibid., 155.
electing one who takes Israel as bride and covenant partner in grace, and recognizes the possibility that obedience and love are not oppositional but complementary.

From the side of God, the commands of the covenant and the loving mutuality are identical, yet Israel perceives this in unclearly related fragments. When she receives the Decalogue (ten laws on two tablets), Israel sets up the image of the calf as substitute for the imageless YHWH. As Balthasar puts it, this act “cuts in two the very act of the giving of the covenant”: it fragments the unity of electing love. As Israel progresses historically, the lack of attunement between her love and obedience to God becomes increasingly onerous: “instead of the living instruction from the mouth of Yahweh there appears the cultic law which has petrified to become something that exists on its own right [i.e., a separate, distinct reality disunited from its living center of divine love], and instead of the gift of self made in obedience of human hearts there appears the substitution of sacrifices with their minutely-regulated activity.”

The force of this fragmentary perception comes to bear in the pivotal section of GL 6, entitled “The Stairway of Obedience.” The stairway begins with evil in the covenant, intelligible only as rejection of love for God. The question Balthasar poses is harmonious with his vision of Holy Saturday: “how will God’s glory respond to this?” Specifically, will God’s glory allow for a space it cannot penetrate and which is immune to the divine glory? To Balthasar this is a question of the integrity of divine glory: “must not God also subdue the chaos from within and from below...? Does not God owe it to himself ‘to glorify’ his glory even [in Sheol] (Ezek. 39:21) and ‘to sanctify’ his holiness

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45 Ibid., 156.
46 Ibid., 157.
47 Ibid., 220.
even there (Ezek 28:22, 25) where all glory has been extinguished since all is empty unholiness?"\(^{48}\)

Thus God begins constructing a stairway of obedience leading through the prophets of Israel to the cusp of Hell itself. The comprehensive characteristic of the prophetic tradition is that these messengers were obedient to their commissioned tasks – it is a tradition not of great commanders, but of obedient servants.\(^{49}\) However, all importance lies on the fact that the missions given to the prophets are still to them extrinsic to their existence. The prophets of Israel are given missions, instructed for a given task, yet although the mission may span a lifetime or indeed exact one’s life, the prophet does not identify himself as this obedience to God’s call, unlike Christ who is his mission.\(^{50}\) The prophets are vessels of God’s *dabar* and *kabod*, they “expose” these to the people. But the prophet does not identify himself in and with this word and glory\(^{51}\) unlike Christ, who is the Word of God.

For example, Balthasar’s points out that Jeremiah is called to give up his entire life to service of God, but even in obedience, Jeremiah faces torment and anguish. Balthasar stresses that we cannot resolve Jeremiah’s experience with psychological analysis, for “the word that lays hold of him and exploits him is a word external to him; the will that drives him is the will of another who compels him to keep on saying, ‘Let not my will be done’, and to keep on doing and proclaiming precisely what he would like

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 222.

\(^{49}\) See Ibid., 225.

\(^{50}\) See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for discussion of this point.

\(^{51}\) See *GL* 6 235.
to avoid at all costs.”

For Jeremiah, as for all the prophets, obeying God means obeying an external word, a will they cannot identify as their own. Jeremiah experiences the brokenness of the covenant, not merely in the sense of salvific efficacy, but in an aesthetic fragmentation. The prophet stands not as a representative of the people, but faces their rejection and stubbornness. The remove he experiences between himself and God’s mission embodies and rehearses the fractal covenant in which, though obeying and loving God can be historically justified and demonstrated for the people, disobedience and rejection are common practice.

Job, the climax (or better, nadir) of Balthasar’s presentation, shows the extremes. Job recognizes the disproportion between his actions and his sufferings, and they comprise a set of images he cannot resolve for himself. For Balthasar, when Job finds no resolution for this lack of balance, concedes to God, and God four times calls Job “servant,” this suggests God himself has led Job into this darkness. It is, in his mind, a preparation for Christ, but the open-ended conclusion of Job is vital. There is no resolution to Job’s suffering, no clarity to the images he cannot piece together. They remain for him estranged fragments of a real but unknown whole, and his obedience and love for God persist in a state of confusion and darkness.

The fragmented covenant leads to the final period of history between Israel and the Incarnation. After the exile, God’s elect people grope for Him. In Balthasar’s words, the post-exilic period is marked by the attempt to “force the glory of God into the open, despite its elusive hiddenness.” Although Balthasar sees the messianic, apocalyptic, and wisdom theologies as important antecedents to the New Covenant, they nonetheless are

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52 Ibid., 257.
53 Ibid., 303.
projects doomed to failure, because each is an attempt to tie together the fragmented images of Israel’s experience with God and discover their true form.\textsuperscript{54} Thus it is the partial perception of the covenant that is fundamental, for this fragmentary understanding of relating to God will only be complete in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{55}

In sum, Balthasar connects the obedience of Israel to her perception of God. While Israel knows God’s electing love can only be given a proper response in obediential love, this movement still occurs remotely from the natural movement of love in Israel. It has come closer than just for the creature as such, since Israel can recognize God’s election touches all aspects of her life and identity. However, the call to love and obey God is mediated through a number of commandments with vocation and election still lying on the outskirts of the self. This is not to vilify or condemn the covenantal form of obedience, but only to point out that it does not contain the natural attunement of the commandments, election, and loving God. Israel’s open-ended experiments in the post-exilic period point out that while she does not fully understand the nature of her relation to the glorious One, she nevertheless is convinced of the fact of its coherence, where obedience and love coincide and where the former naturally flows out of the latter. Yet

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 302 – “…they must inevitably seek to anticipate the synthesis and…these attempts must fail, since they are hybrid (not to say hubris).”

\textsuperscript{55} Dickens, 154-59. Dickens situates Balthasar within modern Old Testament scholarship and asks whether Balthasar uses the OT as a foil for the New. In general, the modern practice has been to see the post-exilic period as a movement away from the pinnacle of the prophetic and pre-exilic periods. Following the categories of Jon D. Levenson, Dickens argues that this move is an expression of anti-Semitism, and that it is present in Balthasar’s theology to an extent. However, he clarifies that Balthasar did not dismiss the OT as a “warning sign” of how things had gone wrong, showing Balthasar has deep appreciating for the Law, and also thinks the OT provides “a host of images crucial for understanding Jesus Christ in his relation to the Trinity” (159). I am not convinced this view is intrinsically anti-Semitic as Levenson’s work suggests, but is rather a consequence of revelation.
she lacks the ability to realize and claim this coherence on her own; such attunement can only be found in the natural obedience of the Son.

4. The Archetype: Christ’s Filial Obedience

Under Balthasar’s implicit schema of obedience, Christ’s obedience is unique and archetypal. Christ’s obedience is filial, not flowing from his being simply man, but from the hypostatic union of human nature to the eternal Son. As we have seen, the failures of creaturely and covenantal obedience to be archetypal fall to the inability for love and obedience to be perfectly attuned in these obediential forms. However, the Son’s obedience is coextensive with his love for the Father, and thus the content of Christ’s filial obedience is the absolutely singular and archetypal form.

GL 7 unfolds Christ’s archetypal obedience initially in terms of the old covenant. From the view of Israel’s encounter with God, Christ’s filial obedience is an unanticipated conjoining of the “two pillars of the Covenant.” The first pillar is God’s dabar, “his active Word of Wisdom that carries out what he wills, that seeks to establish his righteousness upon earth in the chosen people and to ‘take root’ (Sir. 24.12) on earth.” The second pillar is the sacrificial system, or taken more essentially, the form of mediation between God and Israel, “bearing the people’s guilt and God’s punishment.” Christ represents a new, previously inconceivable form: the mediator, “a man who in free obedience took on himself the sin, now not merely of the people, but of the world.”

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56 GL 7, 34.
57 Ibid. 34.
58 Ibid. 36.
With the two pillars of the covenant, Balthasar has already made obedience central to the Christology he will develop, and not merely because Christ undertakes the mission of mediation in obedience. The pivotal section of *GL 6*, the “Stairway of Obedience,” sets the Christological trajectory of *GL 7*. The prophets heard, served, and delivered the Word of God, and obeyed in response to it – but it was their lack of union with the Word that was the principle of their obedience. Similarly, the Deuteronomic histories present the cycle of proclaimed Word and response of the people that takes the form of obedience – the return to worship of YHWH and the practice of proper sacrifices. Yet underscored in Deuteronomy and Judges is the distance, temporal and otherwise, between the Word and response.

The fragmentary experience of obedience and love in the old covenant is tied to the distance between the two pillars, to their utter non-identification on the part of the people (for whom it could not have been otherwise). However, in Christ the fact that the two pillars are joined concerns the active Word of God not merely spoken or proclaimed, but living in union with the human nature which does not offer sacrifices or vows fidelity before the Word (except in his final priestly act on the Cross), because he is in himself the offer of response. Thus, the relationship between Word and obedience so central to the old covenant is already set into a new context.

This union of Word and human being is most visible under the lens of obedience. In Balthasar’s treatment of Christ’s temptation, he argues the three temptations by Satan are actually one long, intensifying temptation. At heart of this temptation “is a question of the absolute obedience of the chosen servant of God.” Because the temptation concerns *absolute* obedience, Christ’s obedience reveals his person. “By identifying himself
absolutely in his posture of response with the Word of God, the obedient Son destroys any distance that remains between the ‘mediator’ and the ‘Word.’”59 Jesus’ act of obedience points to his identification with the Word, his life as the obedient Son, and the union of God and man.60

An important question in light of this is on what grounds does Balthasar think Jesus’ obedience is so expressive of the hypostatic union? In the *Theo-Drama*, which I address in the following chapter, Balthasar develops this point at length along lines of the Trinitarian *missio*. However, since we are focused on the category of Christ’s experience as archetype, we do better to gain this ground through his earlier and connected work, *A Theology of History*. There Balthasar writes of Christ’s unique “mode of time,” i.e. his unique experience of temporality.61 The initial point Balthasar makes is that for Jesus, his entire existence is the act of receptivity, citing John 6:38 (“It is the will of him who sent me, not my own will, that I have come down from heaven to do”).

Working out this Johannine text allows recognition of Christ’s form of existence. According to this hermeneutic, “the meaning of the Incarnation, of Jesus’ manhood, is first borne in upon us as a not-doing, a not-fulfilling, a non-carrying-out of his own will.” However, this does not mean a passivity or negation of action, but it points toward the

59 Ibid., 74.

60 Cf. Marchesi, *La cristologia di Han Urs von Balthasar*, 248-50. “Obedience is, then, the grand act with which Christ expresses his intimate essence as the Son (*essenza intima di Figlio*); and it is a lived attitude, an existential disposition, which, expressing the divine fullness, is simultaneously the gift of a new fullness, the divine-human (248); “…obedience through love “founds” the existence of Christ and this is the based in his incomparable obedience: it is the “fundamental act,” the “form” of his life” (250).

61 Since the creature’s experience of time is guaranteed by the fact of his or her being a creature, the temporal character of the Incarnation takes on the dimensions of kenosis, or the decision to enter time on the part of God. This means Christ’s experience of temporality is fundamentally distinct from that of the creature as such, though Christ does undergo true temporality in the creaturely sense.
true structure of Christ’s life, “to do the will of the Father.” The reason for this is not due to a deficiency on the Son’s part, but is resonate with his eternal Person. According to Balthasar, “if in him ‘having’ were for one moment to cease to be ‘receiving,’ to become a radically independent disposal of himself, he would in that moment cease to be the Father’s Son.” This is ultimately because of Trinitarian reasons: “the Son’s form of existence, which makes him the Son from all eternity, is the uninterrupted reception of everything that he is, of his very self, from the Father.”

According to this schema, Christ’s unique experience of time is then understood as a unique form of obedience, flowing out of the Trinitarian relations. Or, to put more precisely, “his mode of being here on earth will simply be the manifestation in the created sphere, the translation into creatureliness, of this heavenly form of existence: existence as receiving, as openness to the will of the Father, as subsistent fulfillment of that will in a continuous mission.” Christ’s experience of time is not the brutally given, but is a form of creaturely existence received and accepted in obedience by the eternal Son, consonant with his divine Person and Trinitarian life.

At this point, we discover Balthasar’s reason for why Christ’s filial obedience is the perfect attunement, or even identity between the obiediential attitude and love. In Love

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62 TH, 29.

63 Ibid., 30; Stefan Hartmann, Christo-Logik der Geschichte bei Hans Urs von Balthasar: Zur Systematik und Aktualität seiner frühen Schrift “Theologie der Geschichte” (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2004), 104-15. For a close exposition of this theme, see Hartmann.

64 TH, 31.

65 TH, 33ff.; Hartmann, 103-04. Hartmann points out that this formulation of Balthasar rests upon resisting the Platonic notion that eternity is the negation of temporality. Rather, Balthasar’s theology of history rests presumes the Eternal is the ground of the temporal.
Alone is Credible – written as an “elaboration” of GL\textsuperscript{66}- Balthasar makes the case that Christ’s obedience to the Father’s will reveals God’s love for the world and in this same movement of obedience, reveals God’s “eternal majesty and kingship” over creation. Yet this love is itself predicated upon a deeper foundation. He summarizes the point in this weighty passage:

if the kingship of the God who reveals himself as love comes to light precisely in the Son’s humble obedience to the Father, then it is clear that this obedience is essentially love. It is certainly the paradigmatic attitude of love the creature must have before God’s majesty, but far more than that, it is the radiant paradigm of divine love itself: precisely in—and only in—the kenosis of Christ, the inner mystery of God’s love comes to light, the mystery of the God who “is love” (1 Jn 4:8) in himself and therefore is “triune.”\textsuperscript{67}

Since Balthasar does not fully develop the Trinitarian implications of this claim that Christ’s obedience is “essentially” love until the theo-dramatics (and TL 2, even later), we will not pursue this logic now. At the very least, what we see in this passage is a clear sense that Christ’s obedience is unique and archetypal because it is the economic “translation”\textsuperscript{68} of the Triune relations of love of gift and self-gift. As such, Christ’s obedience is not only predicated upon the Son’s eternal love but is the economic manifestation of this love.\textsuperscript{69} To think of Christ’s obedience as “filial” is to emphasize its unique and inimitable foundation in the Triune life of love that then established itself as both model and means for this filial obedience to be communicated to his disciples.

\textsuperscript{66} LAC, 11.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 87
\textsuperscript{68} TH, 31.
\textsuperscript{69} Cf. Beaudin, 83-93. Beaudin emphasizes that because Christ’s obedience is the manifestation of the Triune life, it is economic, i.e. soteriological: “Thus Balthasar redirects (reconduct) all transcendence to the human obedience of Jess Christ which, with its very existence an expression of trinitarian love, opens to man the heart of God, doing so with his will of salvation (ne fait qu’un avec sa volonté de salut) (88).
One of the most important ways Balthasar emphasizes the Trinitarian ground of Christ’s experience of loving obedience is his description that Jesus possesses what Balthasar will later call “a priori” obedience.\(^70\) Quite simply, this means that Jesus “does not anticipate the will of the Father”\(^71\) but instead is open to whatsoever will come to him from the Father. Balthasar ups the ante in his later formulations by his development of the “Trinitarian inversion” – another theme we will explore in depth in the next chapter. For now, it suffices to note Balthasar means by this that in the Incarnation, the Son is preceded by the work of the Holy Spirit (hence the *filioque* is inverted). Jesus is “driven” by the Spirit into the desert to face temptation, which Balthasar interprets as receiving the Father’s will through the Spirit – in the *oikonomia*, the Son does not determine the Spirit, but is led by him.\(^72\)

In this schema, the Spirit’s presence in the Incarnation is the Father’s loving “accompaniment” of the Son. The Spirit is how the will of the Father is communicated as an act of Trinitarian love, following John 5:20: “For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing.”\(^73\) The Spirit’s presence to Christ is thus on the one hand, the leading out into the mission of the Incarnation, but also this “showing” in love. It is in this context that the Son’s obedience plays out: “it is a Father’s love, which is coactuated in its self-disclosure in the Son, so that, as the next verses show, the Son’s enactment of this love in his loving obedience becomes the presence of the Father’s authority in the


\(^71\) *TH*, 36.

\(^72\) “Christology and Ecclesial Obedience,” 143.

\(^73\) Ibid., 144.
world.” All of this is due to the fact that the Son does not “anticipate” the will of the Father, but receives it from the Spirit in loving openness, as a gift of love from the Father.

In *GL 7*, Balthasar develops an example of this at length in his discussion of Christ’s “absolute poverty.” Drawing upon St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Balthasar notes it is impossible for the servant to be above the master, and thus examines the foundations of Christ’s call to poverty to the disciples. On the side of the disciples, they understand the call to poverty within the call to discipleship itself: “Come follow me” is coextensive with “sell all you have and give it to the poor.” For them, “this unconditional leaving of all things is the presupposition of the necessary readiness for all things on the part of the disciple.” Hence for the disciples, the life of poverty means a life of obedience.

But if Christ demands this identification on the part of his disciples, in what sense does he himself live this out? On the part of Jesus, it is established through the paradox that in him Word and man are united: God’s action (his Word) is present, but also remains for the future. Jesus “makes his absolute claim in equally absolute poverty, and in the vulnerability which belongs to poverty, in the renunciation of all earthly power and

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74 Ibid., 144.

75 Gilbert Narcisse, OP, *Le Christ en sa beauté*, 60-67. Narcisse argues that Balthasar’s conception of Christ’s authority, poverty, and abandonment in the movement of obedience reflects a mediation between the Alexandrian and Antiochene struggles leading up to Chalcedon. He suggests that for Balthasar, Christ’s authority symbolizes the divine nature, his poverty the human, and his experience of abandonment their unity. Though I am not sure of this organization, it nevertheless helps to show Balthasar’s point that the poverty of Christ is not simply taking up solidarity with the human condition, but is also an expression of his life as the obedient Son who is expressing this filial existence in the idiom of the Incarnation.

76 *GL 7*, 132-33.


78 Ibid., 133.
every earthly possession.”

Jesus’ assumption of poverty is the absolute form of poverty, as it is the renunciation of ownership of existence itself. This is because, as we saw above, the Son does not anticipate the Father’s will but accepts it in love. For this reason, “Jesus is the bringer of salvation, equipped only to pass on what he has to others; for himself, he has nothing.”

For example, Balthasar writes that the Our Father is “a beggar’s prayer from start to finish.” This is because it is a prayer that calls for God to act, but does not set the conditions of this act. In the mouth of the Son, this prayer is a sign of his “total dependence” on God: “Jesus himself lives from the prayer in which the Father gives him the nourishment which he needs.” The prayer of the Son is the verbal extension of his fundamental mode of existence, receiving from the Father what he will give. Likewise, Christ’s life of poverty points to his absolute poverty, the fact that he identifies his own existence with receiving who he is from the Father.

Christ’s experience of God is thus the perfect attunement of love and obedience, because Christ is the love of God (ad intra as well as ad extra) and following this, his life is obedience to the Father. For Balthasar, it is Christ’s giving himself away and passing on glory to the Father that constitutes his essential identity of loving obedience and obediential love. This brings us into contact with the central moment in Balthasar’s

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79 Ibid., 131.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 134.
82 Ibid. 135.
83 Marchesi, La cristologia di Hans Urs von Balthasar, 250. “…obedience through love “founds” the existence of Christ and this is the based in his incomparable obedience…”
schema of Christ’s filial obedience: the Passion and descent into Hell.⁸⁴ In GL 6, we saw
the “Stairway of obedience” unfolding ever more towards the depths of Sheol, towards
the depths of God-forsakenness. It was there not a question of theodicy – whether a good
God will allow his creatures to suffer – but of divine perfection: will God allow a place
where his glory is not welcome, and cannot penetrate? In terms of Christ’s filial
obedience, we can also add to this a question about the perfection of Triune love: are
there any bounds to the Son’s reception of himself in love from the Father? Will he, in his
perfect love and obedience, suffer death and be taken to the place where love and
obedience are extinguished?

Balthasar famously holds that Christ’s life is itself aimed at the Passion, and is
determined by “the hour.”⁸⁵ For him, this is because of a combination of soteriological
and existential reasons. In treating the question of why Jesus offers himself as the
complete and spotless sacrifice and how it is efficacious for us, Balthasar writes,

⁸⁴ I have no plans to offer either a comprehensive account of Balthasar’s theology of Holy
Saturday, nor a prolonged defense of his theses. But, any undertaking of this theme requires some
clarification as to the procedure and the complications of the topic. First, I will primarily draw my
comments in this chapter to Balthasar’s presentation in GL 7 and Love Alone is Credible, since the works
are linked thematically (i.e. around the theological aesthetics). The locus classicus for Balthasar’s
presentation of Holy Saturday is typically Mysterium Paschale, which originally appeared Mysterium
Salutis III/2 (Einsiedeln, 1962), 133-58. Thus, it is actually earlier than both Love Alone is Credible (1963)
and GL 7 (1969). However, since un-knotting MP requires exploring a rather different and challenging
context, I prefer to use this work to make clarifications rather than follow its structure of the argument.

Specifically, MP purposefully engages the breadth of kenotic theology, and places fundamental
stress on the questions of divine immutability and divine suffering. While important, these questions make
for a very different type of project, though one of profound interest to students of Balthasar’s thought. For
those interested in such a treatment, two works recommend themselves. The best work that situates
Balthasar’s approach within the strain of German kenoticism (an invaluable aid) is Thomas Rudolf Krenski,
Passio Caritatis: Trinitarische Passiologie im Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars (Johannes Verlag:
Einsiedeln, 1990). Krenski’s work is also important for his thesis that Balthasar is unique among such
kenotically minded theologians because he maintains a balance between God’s transcendence and divine
suffering, by grounding it in the drama of divine love. Similar to this is Gerard F. O’Hanlon, The
Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University
Press, 1990). O’Hanlon’s focus differs from Krenski in that he emphasizes that for Balthasar, God’s
suffering in Christ is based on a fundamental openness of the God to the created order.

See section 2.2. of the introduction to the dissertation for a discussion of the American
conversation around Balthasar’s conception of Christ’s descent.

⁸⁵ This theme is rehearsed throughout the corpus, but is most concisely laid out in MP, 11-14.
the only help [in understanding the soteriological effect of Christ’s sacrifice] is to be had from the New Testament’s idea of the divine love that *out of love* takes upon itself the sins of the world; and this love *must* have a double character, as the love of God the Father, who allows God the Son to go into the absolute obedience of poverty and self-abandonment where he can be nothing else than the total object that receives the divine ‘wrath,’ and as the love of God the Son, who identifies himself out of love with us sinners (Heb. 2:13) and thereby fulfills the will of the Father in free obedience (Heb. 10:7). 86

Soteriologically, Christ’s life is ordered to the Passion because his taking on the sins of the world is the revelation of divine love. But in Balthasar’s schema this has an “existential” weight, because Christ’s work of suffering *pro nobis* also has the character of bearing out the love for the Father.

Obedience comes to the fore in Balthasar’s depiction, because the Cross and the descent into Hell are the absolute forms of poverty and abandonment in Christ’s life, they are the ultimate instantiation of Christ’s giving himself to the Father. In Balthasar’s theology of the Passion and Holy Saturday, Christ follows the Father’s will into the extremes of suffering, into God-forsakenness. He notes that the Father sends out the Son, and “abandons” him on the Cross. 87 The Father loads the sins of the world upon the Son, at the hour determined by the Father. 88 Hence Christ displays the *willingness* to go the Cross, making his path of suffering and abandonment an expression of the Son’s loving obedience to the Father. 89

86 *GL* 7, 207.

87 E.g., Ibid., 214.

88 E.g., Ibid., 216.

89 This system does, of course, have profound implications for Trinitarian theology that cannot be lightly cast aside. I will deal with some of these problems in the next chapter, but for now, we can clearly see that the strict giver-receiver logic Balthasar employs can easily fall into subordinationism. In my article “Towards Filial Obedience” I argue that Balthasar *means* to avoid such a problem, but ultimately his conception of the relationship between love and obedience needs to be reworked – according to a
Central to this is the fact that, to Balthasar, Christ experiences the complete abandonment of God. When Christ receives the weight of the sins of the world, he does so in obedience; yet this act of obedience bears the force of infidelity – the act of love for the Father is taking up the essence of rejecting God. According to the model of the Old Covenant, God’s response to such state of sin is to abandon one to the enemy. The Father maintains this with the Son, who is abandoned because in his obedience he has taken on disobedience.

Now we reach a pivotal juncture, regarding Christ’s “victory” over Hell. Alyssa Pitstick claims Balthasar’s theology is faulty because he lacks a triumphalist view of Christ’s descent, but unless we understand his theology of filial obedience, we miss his

Confucian logic of xiao – in order to avoid the problem. See also chapter 8 of this dissertation for an expanded suggestion of this principle.

90 Birot, Le dramatique trinitaire de l’amour: pour une introduction à la théologie trinitaire de Hans Urs von Balthasar et Adrienne von Speyr (Lethielleux: Parole et Silence, 2009), 83-84; Levering, “Christ’s Consciousness on the Cross.” Birot emphasizes that for Balthasar, Christ experiences the Father in a “purely objective” manner (purement objective). As he puts it, “when the Son is at the lowest point, the absence of God becomes for “so objective and so absolute” that he feels the power of evil more than his relationship to God. This last clause comes from a quotation from Adrienne von Speyr, and shows the deep complications with this aspect of Balthasar’s thought. Not only is there a problem in saying the Son experiences God’s absence (does he ceases to be?) but also, if the Son’s descent is an active of filial love and obedience this would seem to mean that for the Son at least, God is not “purely objective” but rather is part of his subjective awareness, particularly in regard to evil. Levering’s argument brings this to light as well: following John Paul II, he argues that Christ must have hope of God’s defeat over evil (which I would argue seems implicit in Psalm 22). This hope seems to flow moreover from the Son’s perfect love that makes sense of his obedience. Thus, I do not think Balthasar’s approach to this topic is entirely consistent; such an emphasis on filial love that Balthasar exhibits seems to me to lead away from his conception of Christ’s experience of abandonment.

91 GL 7, 224. See Menke, and Schumacher, “The Concept of Representation in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” Theological Studies 60 (1999): 53-71. Menke argues that for Balthasar, the fact of a primordial Trinitarian “distance” encompasses all other distances which then allows Jesus to “take the place of” (Stellvertretung) all sinners and human failing. However, Schumacher criticizes Balthasar for overly emphasizing the representation of the sinner in his soteriology and neglecting the Trinitarian ground in the sense that the Son represents the Father. Hence, rather than emphasizing the taking up of the distance of sin, she argues Balthasar’s Christology ought to lead to “a theology of redemption presented as the incorporation of the human person into the Trinitarian life of giving and receiving, by means of a self-gift empowered by the gift received” (55). I tend to think Balthasar’s ecclesiology bears out Schumacher’s insight as shown in section 5.

92 Pitstick, 14-17, 203-16.
reasons for this rejection. Jesus’ obedience is fundamentally ordered by his kenotic love for the Father and for the world’s salvation, and as such involves obedience “unto death, death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). For sin leads to death, but this is not merely physical; it is the “loss of the living relationship to God” and is a “realm of (eternal) darkness, as ‘dust,’ ‘silence,’ an existence without strength, without activity, without enjoyment, without knowledge of what takes place on earth, without praise of God, without return, an existence in nothingness and oblivion.”93 If Jesus is to truly bear the sins of the world, he must also enter this death, the state of silence of Hell where the Word is not uttered, but “becomes objectively present in the world of the dead through the event itself, and thereby is made known.”94

What this means is that if Christ is to suffer the death of sinners pro nobis, it must be a true death, in all its tragic passivity.95 Thus Balthasar does not think it possible for Christ to actively proclaim the gospel in Hell and thereby claim the keys to death, Hell, and the grave. However, Christ’s passive experience of Hell is bounded on all times by the fact of his loving obedience that has taken him there. “When he takes on this solidarity with sinners, in their most extreme condition, Jesus carries the Father’s saving will out to the end. It is an absolute obedience that reaches out beyond life and stands the test precisely in the place where otherwise only coercion and servitude reign.”96 Thus, Christ’s descent into the passivity of death in Hell is proclamation because his obedience

93 GL 7, 229.
94 Ibid., 230.
95 Ibid. “…we have here no active descent—far less, a triumphant descent to take possession, or even only a descent that is a struggle in battle; we have only in this ‘sinking down’ into the abyss of death, a passive ‘being removed.’”
96 Ibid., 230-31.
not only takes him into Hell, but constitutes his being there. Hence, his loving obedience to the Father is “objectively present” in the realm of rebellion and detestation, and bears witness to the Triune love and glory precisely in Christ’s experience of abandonment and God-forsakenness.

Under Balthasar’s schema, Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension are the Father’s “affirmation” of the loving obedience and obediential love that took him to the depths of Hell. These events gain their character from the Son’s loving obedience, and they are the triumph of the cross over death, hell, and the grave. This is because they are grounded in the Johannine “request for glorification” (Jn 14:13-15), that the Father glorify the Son. Balthasar sees that “the request for glorification that the obedient Son makes to the Father is born of an understanding of the obedience of the Son as the ‘glorification’ of the Father.” Christ’s filial obedience glorifies the Father precisely in this obedience, since his is a form of loving obedience and obediential love that has no solipsism, but is a genuine passing on to the Father. For Balthasar, this ultimately means that since Christ’s filial obedience takes him unto death and Hell, and since it is precisely as obedience that his filial love is manifest, “it belongs…to the Father to adduce the proof of this double identity…in the glorification of the Son.”

The Resurrection and Ascent are thus the Father’s “action,” his act of “disclosing” the Son, which is the complement to the Son’s existential reception of himself from the Father. For our purposes of understanding Christ’s archetypal experience, however, we primarily point to the fact that in these acts the Father “accomplishes and reveals the

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97 Ibid., 246.
98 Ibid., 249.
99 MP, 203-17.
identity of obedience and eternal love.”¹⁰⁰ This leads Balthasar to the startling conclusion that, “one may say that the central concern of a theological aesthetics must be the correspondence between obedience and love.”¹⁰¹

Moreover, this shows that the theological aesthetics is based on the “perfect proportion which Christ, through his obedience, has established once for all between heaven and earth and between the will of the Father in Heaven and his own will on earth.”¹⁰² Not only does Christ live out of the perfect proportion between the eternal Word and human being, established in the perfect attunement of love and obedience, he now becomes the principle for this union and proportion to be mediated to the world, in a way impossible to experience before him. In light of this, then, there is one more step to take in order to fully appreciate Balthasar’s conception of Christ’s filial love and obedience as archetypal, and that is to investigate its mediation.

5. Mediation of the Archetype

That Jesus’ experience of God is archetypal does not mean he is merely a model, but that he is the source of an experience of God established in his life of filial love and obedience. This experience is ultimately communicated to the Church, in Balthasar’s thought, as participation in Christ. First, Balthasar sees the establishment of the Church as the Spirit’s revelation of the mutual and eternal love of the Father and the Son, i.e., the Spirit’s presence with the disciples is for revealing what was in Christ, for “nothing other than the bringing to light of the love that lives in obedience, of the identity with the

¹⁰⁰ GL 7, 255.
¹⁰¹ Ibid., 261.
¹⁰² Ibid., 262.
loving Father that lies in the distance.”\(^{103}\) The Spirit’s presence bears testimony noetically to the Son’s obedience to the Father, but also makes it possible to remain in this love; it is both “initiation into love and announcement of love.” Because of this, the Church led by the Spirit does not love God simply in the way the creature ought. Rather, she knows “a ‘glorious’ permission to love.”\(^{104}\)

The result of this is that the Church is the “dwelling place” made on earth for Triune love, which took the form of Christ’s filial obedience. As such, decidedly Christian love is “love out of obedience to Christ, and so love as a participation in the accomplishing of the obedience of Christ.”\(^{105}\) The Church carries on the momentum of the Cross – which is fundamentally the perfect attunement of love and obedience. This is why Balthasar explicitly states, “nothing is fruitful in the Christian sense, unless it derives from christological obedience.”\(^{106}\) For example, Balthasar emphasizes that John’s teaching to “love one another” is not a generalizing principle, making social harmony a lesson deduced from the drama of divine love. Rather, John “intends to show the Church’s love as the continuing existence of Christ’s self-giving in love.” This is because the Church’s obedience to the command of self-giving love for the world is sharing in the fruitfulness of Christ’s filial obedience, which has as its principle the love which compelled the Father to send his Son (Jn 3:16), and goes unto death for the sake of love.

Since Christ is the temporal transposition of the eternal Triune life, his obedience signifies the formal coherence of his love for God, his acceptance of his mission, his love

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 252.

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 255. Balthasar cites Romans 8:21.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 256.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 258.
for the world, and his existence. The Church’s participation in this reality is truly entering into Christ’s own state of life, as seen especially from Balthasar’s theology of the elect state, explored at length in *The Christian State of Life*. Those who enter the religious life – i.e., the state of election – and take vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity represent Christian holiness itself, because of the relation of this state of life to the Christoform archetype. According to Balthasar, the state of election cannot be described as a “radiacalization” of the secular state, but is only formed in “a new and qualitative act of God who…establishes a new state of life through his acceptance of the Son’s sacrifice on the Cross.”  

Thus this state is not a human construction, but is a possibility established solely in the act of Christ’s obedience and is in all ways dependent upon this foundation. Christ is not only the cause, but also the content of this new possibility; the state of election is “the possibility of taking one’s stand in [Christ], of having one’s place in his love for the Father and for men, which is a love of perfect renunciation.” The state of election is therefore defined by Christ’s obedience as its principle, form, and substance. Balthasar goes so far as to assign the state of election participation in the kenosis of the Son. Those elect “take their stand by Jesus Christ in order to complete with him his movement from the Father to the world.” In turn, because the state of election is the most essential form of working out of the Christian call to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus, through

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107 *CSL*, 199.

108 Ibid., 158.

109 Ibid., 349. Emphasis mine. See Steck, 78. “The Christian’s prayerful movement ‘upward’…toward God, enters into the tripersonal surrender of the Godhead ‘downward’… The creature’s surrender to God becomes a participation in God’s surrender to it, and, ultimately, in God’s kenotic movement toward creation and in redemption. . . .The eros striving of the human spirit remains, but now it is integrated into the divine, self-giving movement of *agapē* (kenotic) love.”
this state it is clear that Christian life is “the formal sharing in Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross” and “a sharing in Christ’s kenosis itself.”

In addition to the state of election, we can see the ecclesial participation in Christ’s obedience in the model of the Blessed Mother. In “Christology and Ecclesial Obedience,” Balthasar first develops his account of Christ’s “a priori obedience” as we saw above: Christ accepts his mission as mission and not as content which he has weighed and decided the task is worth his devotion. Jesus’ obedience to the Father’s will is an obedience that is openness and reception, and whatsoever this mission will be, Christ will obey.

Because the Church is bound to the forma Christi, she is also bound to a character of a priori obedience – the Church cannot merely do what the Spirit leads a posteriori. Here Balthasar speaks of baptism as a form of participation in this a priori obedience, since it is a “ratification” that is “an obedience that affirms a previous reality, and for that reason is returning home to one’s own reality.” On a different scale, Mary represents what it means to “ratify” oneself within the form of Christ’s obedience as following him in emptying ourselves in freedom so that we find ourselves again in the obedient service to God. Mary’s is a freedom that is expressed in remaining available for God’s call; an obedience that is readiness to let God’s will be done. Moreover, Mary is taken along with Christ in his fulfillment of the Law (in her Temple purification) and goes with him to the Cross (where she is “abandoned” by the Son and given another son, John). These aspects of Mary’s life are, according to Balthasar, the “making the Church similar in form to the trinitarian obedience.” In Mary’s loving obedience, “in this originating cell of the

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110 Ibid., 219.

111 “Christology and Ecclesial Obedience,” 146. Emphasis original.
Church, the loving trinitarian obedience of the Incarnate Son can be imprinted without resistance.”112

6. Conclusion

For Balthasar, Christ’s obedience is uniquely filial, established in and expressive of the eternal Son’s love for the Father. This means not only that his love is distinct from the forms of obedience appropriate to the old covenant and to the creature as such. It also means that this obedience alone can be established as the norm for Christian life, because it participates in the perfection of divine love. Moreover, we have seen that Balthasar perceives in Christ’s filial life a perfect proportion between love and obedience, identification as it were between these two values.

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112 “Christology and Ecclesial Obedience”, 148-49.
CHAPTER 4

MISSION, HISTORY, AND OBEDIENCE: CHRIST’S FILIAL OBEDIENCE IN THEO-DRAMA

1. Introduction

In both TH and GL, the central Christological insight regarded Christ as history: his filial obedience is the norm and space of possibility for all other singularities. In TD, the complementary focus of Balthasar’s theology on Jesus in history shines through. Specifically, the first half of TD3 – which is the most clear Christological treatise Balthasar provides – coalesces how Balthasar understands the Incarnation as the dramatic midpoint in the relationship between the Triune God and the created order.

The goal of this chapter is to present and examine the theme of filial obedience as it appears in the “missional” Christology of TD3. This volume presents a Christology centered upon Christ’s dramatic role (Rolle) or mission (Sendung). In a sense, this Christological construct is meant by Balthasar to negotiate the historicity of Jesus’ life without inserting a caesura between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. At all times, Christ’s Sendung is both a true historically expressed mission, and is a Trinitarian missio expressive of the divine love. Consequently, TD3 allows for the opportunity to

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1 Alberto Espezel, “La cristologia dramatica de Balthasar,” Teologia y Vida L (2009): 305-18. Espezel calls into question Rahner’s contention that Balthasar’s Christology is “Neo-Chalcedonian,” i.e., with monophysitic tendencies and an overly high Christology that does not emphasize the human nature of Christ. Espezel shows that the dramatic Christology of Balthasar does indeed involve a deep engagement with the humanity of Christ and his experiences.
explore how filial obedience functions in both Balthasar’s Trinitarian theology and his conception of the Hypostatic Union.

2. Approaching a Dramatic Christology

Balthasar’s Christology in *TD3* presupposes a dramatic methodology. Laying out the basic principles of this method is thus fruitful for understanding his Christological approach and claims. The central, most foundational principle of the dramatics concerns God’s acts *ad extra* and his goodness. Whereas for Scholastics such as St. Thomas, the *bonitate Dei* was explained through appeal to God’s perfection and his being first cause, for Balthasar it primarily relates to God’s life as love compared with the contingent nature of creation. Because none of God’s acts towards the world are necessary, they are taken out of love and are thus good. Hence God’s goodness is not approached essentially, but in terms of infinite loving freedom to do what was not necessary and bring about the created order.

Yet at the same time, the essentialist conception of God’s goodness is not lost: since God’s goodness is also tied to his perfection and simplicity, the fact that God

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2 Volker Kapp, et al, eds. *Theodramatik und Theatralität: Ein Dialog mit dem Theaterverständnis von Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000); Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The Kapp edited volume is one of the best essay collections engaging Balthasar’s theo-dramatic approach. For those interested in the conceptual structure behind the theo-dramatics, two of the essays are recommended: Alois M. Haas, “Prinzip Theatralität bei Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Theodramatik und Theatralität*, 17-32, and Stephan Grätzel, “Der philosophische Hintergrund von Balthasars Theodramatik,” *Theodramatik und Theatralität*, 33-42. Quash is worth noting because in addition to his scholarship on Balthasar, Quash is one of the leading English voices who attempt a broader “theo-dramatic” method. Quash defines this as “a way of thinking theologically about historical process and the historical character of human agents and environments that emphasizes their dramatic features” (Quash, 1). Those interested in dramatic methodology as such would find Quash an excellent resource.

3 E.g., *ST* Ia q. 6.

4 *TD 1*, 18-19. Here Balthasar evokes in a sense the Neo-Platonic principle of the self-diffusing good (*bonum diffusum sui*). It should be noted, then, that while he approaches it differently, Balthasar’s conception of God’s goodness tied to the gratuity of creation is quite similar to St. Thomas’ account, especially visible in light of his treatise on the Incarnation – see, e.g., *ST* IIIa q. 1 a. 1.
creates the world points toward his essence in this infinite, loving freedom. Balthasar stresses, of course, that ultimately, God is not drawn into the “ambiguities of the ‘Welttheater’” meaning God’s essence cannot be “read off” the created order as such. However, there is space for a penultimate description, because the Welttheater exists out of God’s free act, and thus there is an “inner link” between the drama of the world and divine action. This principle gives Balthasar’s approach a simple foundation: although God does “go incognito” in taking up the world’s ambiguities, it is precisely through this taking up the ambiguities and not destroying them that God reveals himself in the world. God chooses the world as the stage for his acts, and thus what is done pro nobis in the oikonomia is inseparable from what his goodness is in se.

We have in this a significant departure point for Balthasar’s approach to filial obedience. Generally, Balthasar’s conception of Christ’s obedience is coextensive with God’s perfections regarding love and freedom. Consequently, we are correct to stress the filial character of Christ’s obedience, not only because of its Trinitarian grounds (as the Son), but also to show how this obedience expresses un-coerced love.

Yet this foundation also provides insight into more general theological principles that Balthasar’ account of Christ’s filial obedience negotiates. Balthasar’s definition of God’s goodness rooted in freedom and love is a distinct move away from the Scholastic approach to this theologoumenon, not primarily due to Balthasar’s distaste of Neo-Scholasticism, but in his relationship with Hegel. In Balthasar’s eyes, Hegel attempted a

\[ ^5 TD 1, 19. \]


\[ ^7 TD 1, 19-20. \]
synthesis of theology and philosophy hitherto untested: instead of making philosophy the ancilla of theology, Hegel inverted the relationship. Consequently, Hegel tried to philosophically explain the Trinity and Incarnation, ultimately formulating the view that God enters history because the historical is necessary for the actualization of Geist.⁸

To Balthasar Hegel’s approach was at once tremendous and terrifying.⁹ On the one hand Hegel had opened paths to understanding how the world “matters” to God, and had in that way helped show the deep interrelation of a theology of creation and theology proper. However, by the same stroke, Balthasar finds that Hegel simultaneously makes God need the world and thus a tragic character, upon whom the world acts. In one sense, Balthasar’s Christology is inseparable from his attempt to hold to the cosmological impact of Hegel, of seeing the world as an act of God and all that implies.

Balthasar’s attempt at a balance is to stress God’s goodness as his infinite freedom, which he thinks allows God’s relation to the world and his self-expression in it through Christ’s sufferings to be real and meaningful for God, without making this circumstance tragic.¹⁰ The key for Balthasar is to establish the free decision of God in his eternal movement of love, thus giving this decision its own logic and movement that

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⁸ See e.g. Philosophy of History; Brian J. Spence, “The Hegelian Element in Von Balthasar’s and Moltmann’s Understanding of the Suffering of God,” Toronto Journal of Theology 14 no 1 (1998): 45-60. For a good examination of how Balthasar’s conception of the relationship between God and history is both dependent upon and responsive to Hegel, see Spence.

⁹ Wallner, Gott als Eschaton, 224-69. Wallner neatly describes Balthasar as “struggling with Hegel” (Das Ringen mit Hegel) on the common ground that the Trinity is “point of contact” (Berührungspunkt) between God and the world. Balthasar’s theo-dramatic approach, grounded in the divine freedom, is an intentional wrestling with Hegel on how this point of contact exists: “this level, on which Balthasar’s theological confrontation with Hegel primarily takes place, is also the meaning Balthasar’s theo-drama makes of the “goodness” of the relationship between the free God and the free world” (225).

¹⁰ O’Hanlon, 50. O’Hanlon points out that in Balthasar, the problem can be stated in terms of attempting to find that happy balance between indifferent Deism and the tragic God of mythology. As O’Hanlon argues, Balthasar rejects the idea that God is changed by his encounter with creation, which is the ground of his avoidance of the mythological statement about God. His negotiation of the Deistic claim is to ground the divine event in God’s free love and goodness, as we have seen above.
cannot be anticipated by the world. The upshot is that being grounded in love, God’s gift to create remains in its essence beyond the “ambiguities of the Welttheater” (and thus theologia is always more than philosophia), yet because it is love, it communicates itself in this free decision (theologia expresses itself through the world).

In a sense, Balthasar thinks that Hegel’s project is too successful – Hegel strives to show the interrelatedness of all things and God, but Balthasar thinks he has lost a description of the difference between God and the things he has made. To Balthasar, Hegel’s philosophy asserted an identity between God’s life and inner-worldly tragedy.\(^\text{11}\) The conceptual center of Balthasar’s response is to assert the analogia entis, which for him is intrinsically Christological and concerns both similarity and dissimilarity. According to Georges de Schrijver, Balthasar uses analogia entis to speak of the “concordance” (Übereinstimmung) between divine and human existence.\(^\text{12}\) This concordance rests upon the “vital exchange” that takes place “between a God who concretizes himself in human history, and the man consenting to this work of the divine incarnation in view of the realization of salvation.”\(^\text{13}\) In Jesus Christ, the union of God and man means the absolute Person “invades” the total development of the human nature

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\(^{13}\) Ibid., 30.
enabling it to reach its own interior perfection.\textsuperscript{14} Hence, Jesus Christ’s life as the “concrete analogia entis” shows that God assumes the ambiguities of the world, perfects the world from within, but remains in himself distinct from his relationship to the world.\textsuperscript{15}

For Balthasar, then, the Chalcedonian formula and its clarification through St. Maximus the Confessor is essential to a theo-dramatic approach.\textsuperscript{16} Since Christ is fully God and fully man without change, separation, or confusion, he truly is the “linking” between God and world without confusing them. He is the presence of the true theologia in the midst of the oikonomia, not entering the latter as a shade or shadow, but the presence of God as man. This point is of escalating importance; as de Schrijver notes, Christ’s obedience is the means by which Balthasar develops the correspondence (correspondance, Entschprechung) of the analogia entis.\textsuperscript{17} As Michel Beaudin puts it, Christ’s obedience is how God enters into solidarity with the world.\textsuperscript{18} In Balthasar’s dramatic schema, then, Christ’s filial obedience is the idiom of the hypostatic union.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 57.

\textsuperscript{15} Michael Schulz, “La cuestión del ser y la Trinidad,” \textit{Teologia y Vida} L (2009): 165-84. Schulz suggests that Balthasar’s conception of worldly ontology is intrinsically founded on the positivity of being. This itself is grounded on similarity with the Trinitarian form of divine life, since worldly ontology in its diversity and differentiation is reminiscent of Triune difference and distinction. Furthermore, Schulz’s important conclusion is that this ground of ontological similarity is what makes God’s revelation intelligible. In terms of Christology, this is an important point to bear in mind, precisely because Balthasar thinks God can reveal himself in the Incarnation, and not just his great difference from the world. At the level of being, there is a similarity or concordance between God and humanity since God grounds human existence, and Jesus concretizes this similarity while also concretizing the difference between them.

\textsuperscript{16} McIntosh, 39-44. We will return to this relationship that McIntosh presents between Chalcedon and Maximus later on.

\textsuperscript{17} De Schrijver, \textit{Le merveilleux accord}, 57.

\textsuperscript{18} Beaudin, 18ff.
However, before we approach this development and the missional Christology that bears it out, we may mention another juxtaposition against which to better understand our theme in the theo-dramatics. As we have seen, the logic of the theo-drama depends upon the fact that the world matters to God. It is the chosen space of the action of divine goodness, and as such, though world is not necessary to God, it is also not incidental. By drawing attention to the harmony between the *pro nobis* and *Deus in se*, Balthasar opens up insight to the link between God’s life and his life to the world.

Balthasar’s focus on Christ as the concrete linking term is consciously distinct from that of Sergius Bulgakov in *The Lamb of God*. In this work, Bulgakov attempts a similar discovery of how the world matters to God, specifically in searching for a link between God and the world that makes the Incarnation possible. Bulgakov suggests the link is established in *Sophia*, God’s own wisdom poured out into the world at creation. For Balthasar, Bulgakov is right to look for the link within God’s own life, but wrong to insist on the sophianic figure as the point of connection. Rather, he will insist that the Trinitarian life as *Deus caritas est* is the sole and sufficient ground.

Christologically, this means Balthasar’s theo-drama emphasizes not only the hypostatic union as the encounter between God and the world, but also that it is a *Trinitarian* encounter. Balthasar derives from this point that the Incarnation and its idiom of obedience reveal aspects of the Triune life of God that make such expression possible and authentic revelation. Consequently, the theo-dramatic Christology requires a more explicit Trinitarian consideration of filial obedience. For Balthasar, the only way to

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20 *MP*, 35. “It should be possible to divest Bulgakov’s fundamental conviction of its sophiological presuppositions while preserving – and unfolding in its many facets – that basic idea of his which we agreed just now to give a central place high on our list of priorities.”
approach such a consideration is to inquire into the self-consciousness of Jesus. Hence, we can now turn to the fundamental structure of TD 3 with its missional Christology.

3. Filial Love and Obedience in Balthasar’s Missional Christology

3.1. The Methodological Contours of Obedience

TD2 and TD3 carry the title “dramatis personae.” This term refers to the list of characters preceding a play or novel providing characters’ names, with a brief description of the flaws or concerns that animate the character. For the audience, the list of *dramatis personae* lets them know what to expect on the stage, how to identify characters, and provides a glimpse of what drives the story. For actors, the description is the initial source for what the character’s function and direction will be in the drama, i.e., an initial glimpse of the role to be played.

In the theo-dramatic Christology, Balthasar’s point of departure is a consideration of the role (*Rolle*) Christ plays in the drama. The theological translation of the dramatic “role” is “mission” (*Sendung*) or “being sent” (*Gedesenter*), and Balthasar’s theo-dramatic Christology centers on this conceptual framework.21 With “mission,” Balthasar already gives insight into his vision of Christ’s filial obedience. For him, the dramatic role of Christ is not simply his place in the drama, but also a taking up of his place. Christ’s entrance into the *Welttheater* is God’s act in accepting a role determined by God. Hence to speak of Christ’s dramatic persona from the outset implies the movement of obedience, though this must be clarified and expanded in several respects.

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Balthasar’s “mission” is on the one hand, a transposition of Rolle into concepts that have theological currency. “Mission” can serve a wide range of notions, including prophetic “vocation,” the apostoleo of the disciples, and has served an important role in Trinitarian theology since at least the middle ages. As McIntosh observes, mission is also the key idiom of the spiritual life for St. Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises.* However, it is also a methodological response to at least two approaches to Christology.

The first is that of the Neo-scholastic textbooks, which Balthasar faults as “[preempting] the action undertaken by him” and “falls back into the kind of purely extrahistorical, static, ‘essence’ Christology that sees itself as a complete and rounded ‘part one,’ smoothly unfolding into a soteriological ‘part two.’” Balthasar means to reject by this phrase a kind of manual Christology, following the structure of the *Summa Theologiae,* that treats the ontological question about Christ apart from or prior to consideration of the historical witness of the Gospels. In its place, Balthasar shows a general preference for the approach of biblical studies, especially Lutheran scholar Oscar

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22 McIntosh, 42-44.

23 *TD* 3,149.

24 John F. Boyle, “The Twofold Division of St. Thomas’s Christology in the *Tertium Pars,*** The Thomist 60 (1996): 439-47. Boyle points out that it was M.-D. Chenu who suggested that Thomas had divided the *ST* III into a “scientific” part I (qq. 1-26) and a “scriptural” part 2 (qq. 27-59). In response, Boyle shows that Thomas’s Christology is set out this way because of the perennial problem of how to organize Christology – one cannot merely give a historical record of what Jesus did and show neatly where Church dogma is to be found. Hence, Boyle argues Thomas begins with a consideration of Who Christ is and then how his life is temporally constructed. The upshot is Boyle’s thesis suggests Balthasar’s criticism is perhaps too harsh. It does not seem that Thomas, at least, assumes the person of Christ can be discerned prior to the historical witness of the Gospels. The challenge Thomas faced was how to have students of theology understand what the Church says about Jesus. Indeed, Thomistic scholarship has shown trends of emphasizing Thomas’ treatment of Christ’s historical life, precisely to undercut the interpretation that Thomas makes the scriptural witness of secondary importance. However, all that said, Balthasar would himself emphasize a difference between the thought of St. Thomas and the manual theologies of the Neo-Scholastics.
Cullman. According to Cullman, the New Testament does not inquire primarily into Christ’s nature, but rather his function; as such, it is always concerned with the harmony of Christ’s person and work, and does not treat them as separate treatises.

This critique of “essentialist” Christology requires a great deal of clarification in order to distinguish what Balthasar is attempting to accomplish. The immediate and most important context is Balthasar’s location in 20th century Catholic theology. During this period, especially in France, several talented theologians expressed dissatisfaction with the manual theologies of their Neo-scholastic education. Though it would be expressed in different ways, the main dissatisfaction seemed to be a perceived separation between the dogmatic content of theology and the biblical and ecclesial witness, i.e., the cleavage between metaphysics (which Neo-scholastics preferred) and history. Balthasar’s theodramatic method is in this sense his contribution alongside work like that of Chenu (emphasizing historical development), Rahner (emphasizing man as a historical being), and his Ressourcement friends (emphasizing ecclesial history).

However, one must also keep in mind the state of German theology since Hegel. Hegel’s greatest contribution was to bring the diachronic aspect of being to the forefront

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26 Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Walden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 1-16, 121-44. Kerr’s book lays out as good as any the Neo-scholastic ethos before Vatican II and how Balthasar’s theology is responsive to it, although he overly identifies Balthasar with Barthian tendencies.

27 Cf. Leo Scheffczyk, *De Mysterien des Lebens Jesu und die christliche Existenz* (Aschaffenburg: Paul Pattloch Verlag, 1984), 10-11. Scheffczyk’s volume is a type of Thomistic response to the general criticisms of German theology regarding the Thomistic “overlooking” of Jesus’ concrete historical life and its theological significance. Importantly, Scheffczyk himself argues that the interest into the mysteries of Jesus’ life is in itself welcome, but is not driven simply by doctrinal concern. Rather, it is driven by the modern need for a pragmatic, social, and political model of Jesus. Hence, the existentialist reading of Jesus, Scheffczyk wants to say, can fall prey to the same philosophical rigidity of which Thomist Neo-scholastics are so often accused. It is difficult to say to what degree thinkers like Balthasar and de Lubac fall under Scheffczyk’s concern; at the least, this suggests to me that we should not accept their narrative of Neo-scholasticism and its methodological problems uncritically.
of philosophical and religious consciousness, at least in terms of his impact on German thought. In this turn to historical consciousness, German culture became the fertile soil for the rise of biblical criticism, especially in the vein of Baur and Strauss,\textsuperscript{28} and existentialism à la Nietzsche. For its part, biblical criticism asserted a cleavage between dogma and history in a different key than Neo-scholasticism. To many scholars, Church dogma was not biblically grounded; the emphasis on the biblical witness and the consequent “quest” for a historical Jesus were built on a distrust of the dogmatic schema of the tradition. Prominent German theologians such as Adolf von Harnack had taken this caesura as programmatic for understanding Christianity and Church tradition, arguing that Christian dogma is essentially “the work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel.”\textsuperscript{29}

Given this context, it must be recognized that Balthasar is not advocating a return to history over-against the dogmatic trajectory of the Church. He is, undoubtedly, inspired by both Hegel and the development of biblical criticism to argue that the biblical “action” should take priority. However, Balthasar’s theology of scripture is such that he cannot divorce the dramatic source of the biblical witness from the conciliar Christologies of the early Church. For Balthasar, this emphasis on function is not meant to displace the importance of Christ’s nature or suggest a dialectical relationship between

\textsuperscript{28} See James C. Livingston, \textit{Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century,} 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 215-36. This distinction goes back to the birth of historical criticism, particularly through young Hegelians such as F. C. Baur and D. F. Strauss.

\textsuperscript{29} Adolf von Harnack, \textit{History of Dogma, Vol. 1,} trans. Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961), 17. On p. 21-22 of the text, it should be noted that von Harnack qualifies this claim to say he never meant to suggest an identification between Greek philosophy and dogma. Regardless, it is notable that von Harnack does not understand the attribution of philosophical categories and concepts by the early Church as a working out the content of the Gospel, but rather implanting something new. And this is precisely the point I wish to emphasize and Balthasar wishes to undermine: Church dogma is not, to Balthasar merely an added construct, but is drawing out the content of the Gospel proclamation.
the two. In *TD3*, Balthasar does not lay out in detail his conception of the Hypostatic Union that underlies his account, especially as drawn from St. Maximus. Yet it is present throughout, as I will show below. In actuality, his attempt at theo-drama is an attempt more like Hegel’s to unite the dogmatic and the historical and less like Hegel’s intellectual descendants who prioritized the historical.

Following this turn towards biblical studies, we can see how Balthasar’s theo-dramatic method is meant to also respond to German Protestant historical criticism, discussed at length in *TD3*. While Balthasar appreciates the concrete scriptural foundation of Christology in biblical studies, he dislikes the general move to radically distinguish the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. Balthasar approaches this division as reworking the “Christological ellipse.” In Christianity, there is a correspondence between a) the person of Christ and b) the Church as the body of his effect and as a hermeneutical position from which to clearly understand what occurred in Christ. With Friederich Schleiermacher in particular, Balthasar argues the ellipse was reconstructed between Christ and the individual religious consciousness, taking Christ as the “most fundamental idea” (*Urbild*) of all religious experience. Eventually this morphs into the “quest for the historical Jesus” over-against the Christ of ecclesial proclamation (i.e., Jesus as non-ecclesial, but historical archetype). However, as the work of Johannes

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30 *TD 3*, 59-148; see Ulrich Johannes Plaga, “Ich bin die Wahrheit”: die theo-logische Dimension der Christologie Hans Urs von Balthasars (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1997), 101-15. Plaga argues that Balthasar’s missional conception of Jesus’ self-knowledge must also be set in the context of his contemporaries Karl Rahner and Helmut Riedlinger. With regard to Rahner, Plaga argues Balthasar is responding to his conception of a caesura between exegesis and dogmatics. Regarding Riedlinger, Plaga contends Balthasar is responding to his claim that the Synoptics present an authentic picture of how Jesus understood himself, but not so with the Gospel of John: it is a “fulfillment Christology” (*Vollendungschristologie*) rather than a Christology based on the historical Jesus (*Geschichtlichkeitschristologie*). While these are indeed momentously important contextual moments to understand Balthasar’s thought, however, it is worth noting that in *TD 3*, Balthasar on more the interpretive schools of Protestant German Romanticism and Idealism, and perhaps he would locate the problems with Rahner and Riedlinger within the worldview created by these schools.
Weiss and Albert Schweitzer show, eschatology becomes a problematic topic for this project.

In his classic *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, Schweitzer discusses the birth of the “eschatological question” in critical studies as a result of research into the psudepigrapha and the authenticity of these texts as representing late Jewish thought.31 The eschatological question was then posed under the following terms: how or does Jesus relate to the eschatological expectations of the late Jewish community regarding the Messiah, and what messianic claims did he make for himself? Schweitzer’s own resolution reveals much of what Balthasar hopes to overcome in *TD3*.

According to Schweitzer, Jesus had imminent eschatological expectations: “he expects the kingdom to come in the very near future and with it that supernatural state of being into which the world and the elect will then be raised. Thus he assumed he will enter it with the rest of the elect like an angel or in some heavenly form.”32 Within the belief of a transition to this supernatural state, Schweitzer argues Jesus could have likely believed that the Messiah “could arise from an ordinary being.”33 Schweitzer goes on to conclude that Jesus saw himself as the Messiah, or rather as one who “would be elevated to the rank of the Messiah-Son of man.”34

For Schweitzer, of course, Jesus was wrong about his beliefs in the kingdom and himself. Yet Jesus accomplishes something despite his own erroneous beliefs. In the face of the messianic eschatological failure, Jesus’ “personality...has great significance for us.


32 Ibid., 317.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 319.
There is something there for all periods so long as the world exists.” So Schweitzer transitions from the erroneous supernatural eschatology to Jesus’ successful modeling of a moral eschatology, wherein Jesus fills us with hope for the “ethical consummation” of all things that inspires our wills to moral effort. Significantly, Schweitzer teaches this “natural and profound moral consciousness” is Jesus’ “action” in the eschatological drama.

We can note here several points of contention Balthasar will face in his theodramatic Christology. First and foremost, Schweitzer’s *Konsequente Eschatologie* requires understanding Jesus as a person who holds eschatological convictions that are distinct from his person. For Schweitzer and the eschatological question of historical criticism, it is presumed that eschatology is “out there,” extrinsic to Jesus’ knowledge of himself. Hence, the treatment of Jesus’ understanding of his person is in relation to eschatological beliefs or teachings – what did he think about reality outside of himself? Balthasar, however, reverses this field of vision. To him, Jesus is not merely a person with eschatological beliefs: Jesus *is* eschatology. That is, the “eschaton” is not for Jesus an abstract moment in or at the conclusion of history. Jesus knows the eschaton in himself, as the Alpha and Omega.

In other words, Balthasar notes that the eschatological question as posed in historical criticism presumes an answer to the ontological, essence question even if it denigrates the theology of the councils. Specifically, this theology leaves out the possibility that Christ is the God-man, or at least suggests this is possibility that must be

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35 Ibid., 480.
36 Ibid., 482-85.
37 Ibid., 485.
verified rather than presumed at the outset. If, however, as Balthasar does we attend to the historical drama of Christ’s life and person with the presupposition of the creed of the councils, then this would radically reform how one considers the eschatological expectations of Jesus. This is precisely because the relationship between Jesus’ person and the eschaton would have to be reconfigured once we confess he is the Logos made flesh.

There is no doubt, however, that Balthasar is not merely trying to overcome historical criticism. For example, his main resource is the Johannine trajectory from the Gospel of John to Revelation, a trajectory almost completely set-aside in the eschatological question as inauthentic – to cite John will not convince the modern critic of dogmatic Christology. But again, we see much of Balthasar’s constitution as a theologian and Christologist in this move. Quite simply, Balthasar fervently believes that the eschatological question cannot be posed in opposition to the full scriptural witness of Jesus as the Christ and cannot be answered effectively apart from the traditional and magisterial witness of the Church. In a sense, Balthasar means to show that it is only in light of the ontological determinations of the tradition that the “action” of Jesus can be clearly discerned and its importance elucidated.

Consequently, Balthasar says we are left with two “overlays” in the New Testament. There is first the dogmatic overlay of the Church, that she interprets Christ’s life and acts as pro nobis, as pouring out the gift of salvation in the concrete form of the Church. Second, there is an exegetical overlay, that it is impossible to dissolve the eschatological themes without dissolving the life of Jesus entirely: we must take seriously
the impact of Christ upon time itself, or at least the nature of his claims to do so.\textsuperscript{38} “Mission” is meant to address these two overlays. For Balthasar, Christology must be pursued on “apocalyptic” lines, attempting to understand Christ’s eschatological self-consciousness. Christ’s awareness of the eschaton is not about historical facts or times – as Schweitzer thought – but is about his person, as the one ordered toward his “hour.”\textsuperscript{39} Balthasar’s missional Christology is designed to show that Christ does not serve an eschatological role in inaugurating kingdom, but his knowledge of himself as the Son sent to redeem the world contains in itself the eschatological trajectory that pervades Christ’s teachings.

This discussion reveals two ideas lying behind Balthasar’s appropriation of mission that greatly inform our theme. “Mission” focuses our attention on the historical self-consciousness of Christ in the midst of the hypostatic union, and how his person has an inviolably eschatological character.\textsuperscript{40} We must therefore “assume that Jesus possessed a sense of mission that was eschatological and universal. He was to complete his task…within the dimensions of his human existence…and this presupposes not only that his mission was unique but that the One sent was equally unique.”\textsuperscript{41} While one may justly distinguish or even divide being and function in the prophets of Israel, such distinction is not possible in Jesus: “here we are presented with Someone who never was, and never could have been, anyone other than the One sent.”\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{38} TD 3, 109ff.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{40} See McIntosh, 44ff.
\textsuperscript{41} TD 3, 149.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 150.
Balthasar thus draws all focus onto the aspect of mission regarding Christ’s “being sent.” Consequently, the conceptual framework of obedience intrinsically shapes his Christology. The terminology of mission implies both One who sends – “No one can give himself a mission”\(^{43}\) – and the obedience to the form of the mission by the one sent as a response to the Sender. Since Jesus is the Incarnate Son, this means that both his “being sent” and his response in obedience are formed in and shaped by his *filial* life of love for the Father.

3.2.1. Dogmatic Aspects of Jesus’ Filial Mission: Trinitarian Ur-Kenosis and Obedience

The Incarnation is the union of God and man without division or confusion. Thus, essential to any conception of this mystery is an understanding of the relation between God and the created order. Especially in Germany, Balthasar’s understanding of the Triune difference-in-unity as the ground of the created order has received a great deal of attention.\(^ {44}\) For our purposes here, we need only note that for Balthasar, the Trinitarian life is in itself an infinite “event” (*Ereignis*) of unity in difference and difference in unity that is the “presupposition” of a world created by God in distinction to God, but still “within” him (*analogia entis*).

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 154.

Our goal in this chapter is more specifically aimed at laying out how Balthasar understands the Trinitarian relations as ground for Christ’s obedience in the Incarnation. Indeed, in addition to the Ignatian character of the concept, the use of the term *Sendung* as the Christological key already points toward a Trinitarian structure. As Martin Bieler reminds, Balthasar resisted attempts to understand Jesus’ person from the perspectives of religious science, psychology, or pure history. Rather, who Jesus is can only be understood from within the Trinitarian dogma of the Church.\(^{45}\)

In the Latin tradition, *missio* complements the inner-Trinitarian *processio*. Especially in scholastic theologies, procession was the term given to the unique form of Trinitarian generation, signifying the origin of the Son and Spirit from the Father by way of similitude, in the form of internal generation that does not tend to anything external.\(^{46}\) For example, the Thomistic conception of *processio* is an extension of the Augustinian psychological analogy, and develops the term as a specific type of generation that is contained within the intellectual subject (out of the vital operation of the intellect) rather than in creating something outside of itself. Hence, *processio* refers to both the fact of the Father’s generation of the Son and Spirit, but also the nature of this generation to remain within God’s life, and outside of time.

St. Thomas uses *missio* to describe the procession of the Son *ad extra* as distinct from *ad intra*. In Trinitarian terms, *missio* signifies the particular form of the procession of the Son from the Father in such way as to enter time and exist in the world, taking on

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\(^{46}\) *ST* Ia, q. 27 aa. 2-3.
human nature. Aquinas emphasizes that in general, *missio* implies inferiority if we take it to mean sending by either command or counsel. Thus, with the Son, *missio* refers only to the fact of his procession from the Father in such wise as to begin to exist in a new way, i.e. that the Son’s entering time and assumption of human nature is distinct from the intra-Trinitarian generation, but is still flowing from the Father, without involving command or counsel.

In one sense, Balthasar’s approach to the Trinitarian *missio* is a play on the Thomistic conceptualization. Evoking Aquinas in *A Theology of History*, Balthasar states that the mission of the Son is the “manifestation, conformed to this world, of his being begotten (*generatio*)”\(^{49}\) Or, as Aidan Nichols puts it, “this identity [of character and mission in Jesus] derives from the fact that the agent concerned has been given a mission not accidentally but as a modality of his eternal personal being.”\(^{50}\) For Balthasar, Christ’s form of existence on earth is “the translation into creatureliness of this heavenly form of existence.”\(^{51}\) The importance is that in Balthasar’s eyes, the *missio* is how God discloses the “dramatic event” of his inner-Triune life. Thus the drama of the eternal relationship of the Father and Son – and not just the fact of the relation – is revealed in the Incarnation.

On one view, this is resonant with Rahner’s configuration of the relationship between the economic and immanent Trinity – we know the latter only through the

\(^{47}\) *ST* Ia. q. 43 a.. 1.

\(^{48}\) *ST* Ia. Q. 43 art. 1, ad obj. 1.

\(^{49}\) *TH*, 31.

\(^{50}\) Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 103. Emphasis original.

\(^{51}\) *TH*, 31.
former. However, there is more depth to this conception of the missional translation that Balthasar asserts, and more consequences to clarify. We have already mentioned the importance of Hegel for Balthasar’s theology, and here we must mention him again. For Hegel attempted to understand the Triune God through philosophical exercise, and in this sense saw the *oikonomia* as so utterly revealing of God that it was a complete and full “translation” (though we might better say “actualization” or “realization”) of the intra-Trinitarian *theologia*. As Cyril O’Regan notes, “it could be asserted that Hegel heals the split between natural theology and a theology of revelation…by suggesting…an adequate trinitarian theology is inclusive of the theology of divine attributes and proofs of God’s existence.”

Whatever critiques are made of Hegel’s approach after the fact, it is clear his conception of the relationship between God and the *oikonomia* was monumental in modern thought. In this regard, both Balthasar and Barth operate in the shadow of Hegel, and show a commitment to a Hegelian interpretation of the *theologia* and *oikonomia*, to a degree. Specifically, the heightened capacity of the economic sphere to display the Triune life becomes a central feature in both theologies. With both theologians, there is a draw to the intrinsicism of Hegel, yet a complementary desire to reconfigure it. That is, both Balthasar and Barth are drawn to the intrinsicism Hegel espies between God’s inner life and God’s acts in the world, even though Barth in particular substantially weakens the instrincism between God and world as such. Clearly for both, key is the question of God as *Deus Revelatus* and how the Incarnation functions in this economic paradigm.

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52 Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 21-24. However, we should not neglect to mention that Balthasar emphasizes the immanent Trinity as the ground of the economic.

Yet invoking this similarity leads to an important distinction between the theologians of Basel. In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth admits the Incarnation and cross must mean something about God, namely that God is capable in his essence of kenosis. The kenotic form of Christ leads to the question of what Trinitarian principles make such a kenosis possible. Barth’s answer to the question is given in the pivotal section, “The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country.” There Barth holds that the kenosis of the Son requires the predication that “there is in God himself an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination.”\(^{54}\) This is an immense shift from the Thomistic formula. Thomas emphasizes that within the Trinitarian life, *missio* names an origin from the Father, but under equality.\(^ {55}\) This is because Thomas thinks the *missio* can only truly name the unique generation that makes the Incarnation possible, but that is guided by the Trinitarian processions and the principle of equality and oneness implicit in them. For Barth, however, the shape of the *oikonomia* holds greater weight, and thus he can speak of something like eternal subordination within God.

We should add that Barth’s position seems also derived from his resistance to the *analogia entis* and its posit of similarity within difference between God and the world. For Barth, the Incarnation is “the way of the Son of God into the far country.” This appears a remainder of dialectical theology in Barth, seeing equivocation between God and the world to such degree that the economic sphere is not only distinct from God, it is alien to him. The immeasurable distance between God and creation, and the lowliness of the latter, must mean that within God is the capacity for abasement and humiliation, and

\(^{54}\) *CD* IV/1, 201.

\(^{55}\) Barth of course holds to the equality of the Trinitarian persons, but seems to distinguish between equality in *ousia* and dignity.
thus Christ’s kenotic obedience reveals abasement as an eternal condition within God. This discussion of Barth is of essential importance, for to him the obedience of Christ truly represents the Trinitarian life, as an expression of eternal subordination and subservience.

Balthasar, however, provides a different approach on the relation between *processio* and *missio*, allowing his conception of Christ’s obedience to be appreciably distinct. Barth’s conception of eternal subordination is based on a) his dialectical perception of the economic sphere, and b) his Hegel-inspired hermeneutic regarding the degree to which the economic Trinity informs the immanent. Balthasar, showing a debt to Aquinas, accepts safeguards on both fronts. On the first, he maintains a strong conception of the *analogia entis*, and emphasizes creation as flowing out of the Trinitarian drama. This is because of the second front, by which Balthasar locates the differentiation of the Triune persons within a self-giving that “contains” the difference within unity of essence and equality.

Whereas St. Thomas prefers the psychological analogy of the Trinity due to his concern regarding unity of cause and effect in God, Balthasar prefers a social analogy of the Trinity, grounded in the Johannine formula *Deus caritas est*. Within the Triune life, the Father’s bringing forth the Logos is done in and as love. In *TL2*, Balthasar writes, “what the Logos manifests visibly of the Father is…love in all its divine dimensions.”

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Hence, “if…we identify the Logos in God as the locus of the unfolding of a divine logic, this logic can only be called a logic of love.”\(^{57}\)

Since our focus is on the second person of the Trinity in particular, there is a significant implication to this logic of love. Similar Trinitarian theologies of divine love (e.g. Richard of St. Victor) tend to align love with the fruitfulness of the Triune life, culminating in the Spirit as the hypostatic love of Father and Son. Balthasar, however, emphasizes the Son’s existence involves a “toward” the Father as a movement of love. This filial “toward” must take into account the nature of the Father’s movement in generation. In God, the Father “is the movement of self-giving that holds nothing back.”\(^{58}\)

Concretely, Balthasar sees this as the Father giving himself away, in a proto-kenotic movement (\(Ur\)-kenosis)\(^{59}\): “he will not be God for himself alone” and “He lets go of his divinity” to the Son.\(^{60}\) The gift nature of this event means “the Son’s answer to the gift of Godhead…can only be eternal thanksgiving to the Father.”\(^{61}\)

A further and more monumental aspect of the “gift” nature of the Trinitarian event – at least for our purposes – is what this means for the Son’s Trinitarian life. Balthasar writes, “the Son, for his part, cannot be and possess the absolute nature of God

\(^{57}\) TL 2, 152; See Lochbrunner, *Analogia Caritatis*. Building on this general insight, Lochbrunner argues that the *analogia entis* is for Balthasar really more of an *analogia caritatis*, the analogy of love. God reveals his “ungraspableness” in the positive expression of himself as love through Christ.

\(^{58}\) TD 4, 323.


\(^{60}\) TD 4, 324.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 324.
except in the mode of receptivity.” But Balthasar knows that this receptivity cannot be understood in terms of either chronological succession or dignity. He avoids these implications by appealing to an “active reception” within God. Specifically this means that while the Father gives himself in the generation of the Son, the Son must reciprocally allow himself to be generated.

Balthasar speaks of the Son’s active reception as an “all-embracing Yes” which is “the refusal to participate in the autonomy with which the Son is endowed.” In this sense, the dignity of Godhead granted in the generation of the Son is expressed in a filial mode: it is defined by a not grasping, in answering Yes to the gift of the Father. This is to Balthasar the eternal life of the Son, for he lives as “making a fitting response to the Father’s total gift of himself by freely and thankfully allowing himself to be poured forth by the Father, a response that is made in absolute spontaneity and in absolute ‘obedience’ to the Father” where “obedience” means both “the readiness to respond and correspond to the Father.”

What makes this obedience particularly filial is the constant character of eucharista permeating the Son’s love for the Father. As Son, he assents to the gift of generation, but expresses this assent in complete thanksgiving love to the Father. As a result, the Son’s obedience is not commingled with notions of prius and posterius, but is a “readiness” flowing out of the Son’s life as love for the Father. For Balthasar obedience,

62 Ibid., 325-26.
63 TD5, 245.
64 TD 4, 329. Cf. Beaudin, 124. “This affirmation by Balthasar makes obedience coextensive with the divinity and humanity of Christ, and more precisely, makes obedience constitutive of his filiation and his figure.”
65 TD4, 329-30.
love, and thanksgiving are in the Son more or less synonymous aspects naming both the fact of generation, and the Son’s role within the Trinitarian drama.

The primary consequences of this for Balthasar concern God’s relation to the world. Within God’s life is a primal kenosis (the self-giving Father) and obediential, loving return (by the Son) that opens an “infinite distance” which is itself contained by love (the Spirit) and which can contain all other “distances,” including sin. Regarding the Incarnation, most important is that Balthasar understands the Son’s love within the Triune caritas as expressed in obedience. Drawing upon Phil. 2:6-11, he sees the Incarnation as an act of the Son’s eternal expression of obediential love. With the missio to enter the economic sphere, we speak of the Son’s obedience to the Father in the concrete act of the Incarnation – the Son’s assumption of flesh is an expression of his Sonship precisely since it is continuous with his eternal processional life of saying Yes. This Trinitarian foundation stands at the heart of Balthasar’s approach to Christology through Jesus’ consciousness. Above all else, it is an attempt to understand the Hypostatic Union as a filial act of loving obedience flowing out of the Triune life of God.

3.2.2. Dogmatic Aspects of Jesus’ Filial Mission: The Hypostatic Union

For Balthasar, then, the Trinitarian dogma is intimately tied to his conception of the dogma of the hypostatic union. The Council of Chalcedon’s decision to anathematize Monophysitism and the form of St Leo the Great’s response are determinative for his thought. The Monophysite error was, in simplest terms, to conceive of the union of

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66 Tortorelli, 49-53. Tortorelli offers the important reminder that Piet Schoonenberg made devastating critique of the Chalcedonian formulation, arguing that it did not require the witness of salvation history. While Balthasar shows some inclination to dislike the “abstract” categories of Chalcedon, he still seems to me to be consciously working out of a Chalcedonian worldview, but merely relocating the abstractions in salvation history, rather than building a new foundation.
Christ’s divine and human natures on the level of nature, so that the natures were commingled and confused. Following St. Leo the Great, the fourth ecumenical council clarified that it is only on the level of person (*hypostasis*) that the union of these natures takes place; the natures are not themselves commingled, but they are united without separation in the one mediator, Jesus Christ.\(^{67}\)

In St. Leo the Great’s tome, however, does not give the hypostatic union the specificity it would gain through St. Maximus the Confessor and scholastic theologies. Mark A. McIntosh argues that for Balthasar, the great leap that Maximus provides is to begin the language later known as the real distinction of being. Maximus showed a nascent use of the distinction between the order of being (*einaí* or *ousia*) and actual (*hypostasis*) or personal existence (*hyparxis*). Applied Christologically, this allowed Maximus to philosophically distinguish between the union of God and man on the level of *ousia* from the level of *hypostasis*.\(^{68}\)

While McIntosh overlooks its importance, the next great step in the clarification of the hypostatic union was articulated in scholastic theologies. In St. Thomas’ treatment of the hypostatic union he argues against opinions that Christ is one person existing as two hypostases, so that the union of divine and human occurs on the level of person rather than hypostasis. In contrast, Thomas draws upon Ephesus, Constantinople V, and philosophical reflection on hypostatis/person to show why it is impossible to say Christ has two hypostases. His argument can be summarized as follows: “person” merely names the hypostasis of a rational nature, differing only in dignity, while hypostasis names what belongs to nature in the concrete and what receives its predication from the specific

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\(^{67}\) St. Leo the Great, Letter 28, 3.

\(^{68}\) McIntosh, 39-40.
nature of which it is a *suppositum*. Thus, the union of God and man must be said to occur in the Person of the Word as in one hypostasis, for if not, the union would be merely in regard to some dignity or the birth, passion, and crucifixion could not be predicated of the Word.⁶⁹

The vast importance of this development is that in the scholastic period it was clearly articulated that Jesus Christ is the Person of the Son assumed human nature.⁷⁰ Thus, the human agency of Jesus was the exercise of human nature by the Person of the Son. When approaching Balthasar’s missional Christology, this context is vital, for everything depends for him on recognizing that this man Jesus of Nazareth *is* the Person of the Son who has assumed flesh. As such, Balthasar sees the hypostatic union as an event itself, and all of the concrete acts done in this union are genuine human expressions of the Son’s eternal Person as love for the Father.⁷¹

For Balthasar, this determination begins with the New Testament’s approach to Jesus’ person. The language of “Son of God” and “Beloved Son” indicate, “[Jesus’] mission is qualitatively different from that of the prophets who preceded him.”⁷² In the Pauline epistles this is primarily presented as the superiority or preeminence of the Son

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⁶⁹ *ST* IIIa q. 2 art.3 resp.

⁷⁰ René Lafontaine, SJ, “Quand K. Barth et H. Urs von Balthasar relisent le *de Trinitate de Thomas d’Aquain,*” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 124 (2002): 529-48. Lafontaine argues that the difference between Thomas and Balthasar (and Barth) is how they arrive at discussing the persons. Thomas begins with the divine essence and moves to historical missions, while Balthasar begins with the historical order of salvation and then discusses God himself, as I argue above. Hence there is a limit to the degree I assert Balthasar draws upon the scholastic formulation. However, while his understanding of the Trinitarian persons, I think Balthasar’s conception of the hypostatic union is heavily indebted to the scholastic formulae.

⁷¹ McIntosh, 40. McIntosh argues Balthasar understands this very point from Maximus, but I argue this view is problematic. Primarily, this is because Balthasar’s reading of Maximus seems to me dependent upon his reading of scholastic theology, or at least his theological training by Neo-scholastic professors.

⁷² *TD* 3, 150.
over the prophets – while the prophets are faithful servants, Christ is identified with God’s authority over creation. More importantly, each of the gospels presents some version of Jesus’ claim that “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (Matt. 10:40).73 This sort of identification from Jesus is intensified as Jesus a) possesses clarity about his earthly mission, and b) associates his having been sent with “coming,” which “Jesus alone uses in a solemn sense.”74

To Balthasar, these New Testament themes “manifest the Messianic awareness of bringing about, in [Jesus’] own person, an ultimate saving event.”75 Jesus does not go through a process of discernment regarding what he must do in order to fulfill his mission and then pursue those concrete acts. His consciousness of his mission goes deeper, to the existential (and indeed, essential) level. To think of Jesus’ mission – even, and especially for himself! – means to think of who he is.

Particularly in the Fourth Gospel, the filial nature of this missional identity is exceedingly apparent. Balthasar makes much of the fact that in addition to the verb apostellein, John also employs pempein. K.H. Rengstorf had argued the difference between the two verbs is that apostellein concerns establishing the authority of Jesus in God’s authority, while pempein asserts “God’s involvement in the work of Jesus through the act of sending him.”76 Because of this distinction, Balthasar contends the involvement of the Father in the work of the missio is parallel with the processional Ur-kenosis: it is an act of surrender by the Father. Hence, Jesus’ relationship to the Father explicates by

73 Ibid., 151.
74 Ibid., 152.
75 Ibid.
76 Balthasar does not clearly cite the source here, but it seems to be Karl Heinrich Rengsstorf, Johannes und sein Evangelium (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), 404.
*pempein* concerns obedience: “the intimate relationship between the One sent and the One who sends him takes the form of obedience within the Father’s act of surrender.”

On the one hand, the Father’s sending involves a kind of claim on the mission. Balthasar writes, “the Father is the One who sends, and in this act of sending he establishes, guides and takes responsibility for Jesus’ whole existence on earth; he lays down the latter’s purpose right from the start, namely, the salvation of the world.”

The Father’s role also secures Jesus’ *filial* perspective. Margaret M. Turek points out that to Balthasar, the Father “gives over to the Incarnate Son an ‘area’ for collaborative activity, in which ‘area’ the Son is left free or ‘let be’ *vis à vis* the Father’s work.” Hence the freedom Jesus exercises is a filial freedom in its nature and in its exercise as obedience.

What Jesus knows of his identity is that Father has sent him as Son, and he knows his “having been sent” only in relation to the Father. As such, his fulfilling the Father’s will is not one good among diverse others from which he might choose, but it is literally his *raison d’être*. As Balthasar puts it, Jesus “does not do the Father’s will incidentally but lives from it; he always seeks it, because apart from it he can do nothing.” Or, Jesus “is so dependent on the One who sends him that his whole being is in motion toward him.”

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77 *TD 3*, 153.

78 Ibid.

79 Turek, 48.

80 Ibid, 48-49. Turek stresses that Balthasar recognizes Jesus’ obedience and freedom is filial “rather than [a] distinction between Jesus’ infinite divine freedom and his finite human freedom.”

81 *TD 3*, 153.

82 Ibid., 153.
In a sense, Balthasar’s missional Christology goes beyond the categories of command and counsel implicit in “being sent,” because the “being sent” is coextensive with the relationship between the Father and the Son. Jesus’ obedience is never to a command to fulfill a particular act, or a counsel to live a certain way. Because his mission corresponds to his very existence as the Incarnate Son, his obedience is expressed in his very human nature. Jesus understands his earthly being as obedience to the Father, not in terms of subservience, but as filial love in thanksgiving. His life of obedience is the missional expression of the Son’s eternal love for the Father, being “in motion” toward the Father.\textsuperscript{83}

In terms of the hypostatic union, this formulation is quite significant. According to Balthasar’s missional Christology, he is postulating that the union of God and man in the person of the Son means that the eternal life of love of the Son is expressed not only through the Incarnation but as the Incarnation. The entrance of the Son into the \textit{oikonomia} to assume flesh is the expression of his filial life of love in the Trinity. Jesus’ missional self-consciousness is thus tied to the fact that he \textit{is} the union of God and man in the person of the Son, and moreover that he only understands this union from the perspective of the Son’s eternal filial love. Hence the union of God and man in Christ is intrinsically filial: the human nature is a genuine expression or perhaps enactment of the Son’s filial movement toward the Father.

For Balthasar, the fact that the Son assumes the fullness of human nature leads to an important development. With Jesus, we have a profound paradox. On the one hand, the Son’s presence in the economic sphere indicates that His perfect, complete, and

\textsuperscript{83} This should not be taken to imply that the “motion” here is meant to contradict the Aristotelian conception of God’s perfections as unmoved. It may be that Balthasar wishes to call this paradigm into question \textit{to an extent}, but I do not think such a reading is warranted here.
unchanging being is at work: “the whole person of the Son is involved in his work for the world, and his whole human nature, in all its phases and aspects, ministers to it. It is for this work that the Son has been sent.” Yet we also recognize the Son’s mission to redeem the world assumes the fullness of human nature including intramundane temporality, and as such is subject to a particular time frame, the “hour” of Christ’s Crucifixion. This means that in Christ’s mission there is “a paradoxical unity of being (and a being that has always been) and becoming.”

This leads to what I think is Balthasar’s greatest contribution to Christology regarding Christ’ obedience. Because of the Trinitarian and Chalcedonian foundations laid above, Balthasar shows how the supra-historical aspect of Jesus’ self-consciousness both grounds and is expressed in the historical aspects. As eternal Son, Jesus is “a being that has always been” suffering no diminution, development or change in his filial perfection and love. Yet the Son takes up the mode of “becoming” experience in human nature. Consequently, in the Incarnation, the Son’s filial love and obedience involves concrete acts that are historically situated. Above all, this is evident in the “hour” that lies ahead.

For Balthasar there is a need to speak of the historical development of Jesus’ consciousness, although not as a psychological reduction. Rather, he attempts to give full

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84 TD 3, 157.

85 Ibid., 157.

86 It should be noted that Balthasar does quote from B. Welte’s article “‘Homoousios hemin.’ Gedanken zum Verständnis und zur theologischen Problematik der Kategorien von Chalkedon” in Grillmeier-Bacht, Das Konzil von Chalkedon III (Würzburg: Echter, 1954), 51-80. Welte argues that Chalcedon uses “apparently timeless” categories of the Hypostatic Union that must be replaced with historically conscious ones. It is not clear to me whether Balthasar agrees with this interpretation of the council, or simply Welte’s argument regarding the need for historically conscious categories. Regardless, I think it is inarguable that Balthasar would see any such development as a working out of Chalcedonian theology, rather than a dismissal of its approach.
voice to the mystery of the Incarnation that in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son truly assumed the fullness of human nature to himself by virtue of union with his Person. Because the union is the principle of Jesus’ life, his self-consciousness is tied to his life as eternal Son, as is evident in his eschatological consciousness. The eschatological form of Jesus’ mission demands more than what can be given in a mortal life, and hence there is a great “chasm” between the mission of the Incarnation and the capability of human nature of fulfill it. Drawing upon Gregory of Nyssa, Balthasar notes this is a chasm already present in the distinction between human and divine natures as such, such that the perfection of human nature comes from being lifted up into a status exaltationis. In terms of the Incarnation, this means that Jesus “in virtue of his absolute obedience, he identified himself with what God expected of him (and in him) above and beyond what he was able to achieve.”

This eschatological chasm allows Balthasar two important moves that help bridge the movement from the dogmas of the Trinity and hypostatic union to the historical aspects of Jesus’ filiality. First, it allows him a strategy from which to understand Jesus’ inability to “fully vindicate his claims during his life span.” Second, it provides a strategy that dislodges this inability from an imperfection of intellect, and places it in a temporal dynamism, and entails a relocation of the intellectual perfections of Jesus. For Balthasar, “while his status exaltationis… is not existentially accessible to him, this will not prevent him from having an unshakable awareness, from before all time, of his

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87 TD 3, 160. Emphasis original.

mission.”90 In other words, what Jesus knows about himself the most is the fact of his being sent, i.e., his filial character and the need for filial response in obedience and love. The temporal facts of his “hour” are hidden not because of imperfections, but because of his perfections as Son.

3.3. Jesus Christ as Mission: Filial Consciousness in History

According to Balthasar, the Incarnation concerns not merely the appearance of the Son in flesh, but the Son’s performing or enacting his sonship in the idiom of human nature. The historical aspects of Jesus’ self-consciousness thus concern the enactment of his life as Son through the mode of human history. At its most basic, this means Balthasar thinks that Jesus is “initiated” into his filial self-consciousness. In this section, we will focus on how this “initiation” reveals a dynamic filial identity in Jesus, so that his self-consciousness of himself as the Incarnate Son is “deepened” through the performance of filial acts in the concrete, historical world he inhabits.

Balthasar argues that Christ’s self-consciousness of his mission is “absolute,” meaning Christ completely identifies himself with his mission: “everything in him, mind, intelligence and free will, is oriented to it.”90 Jesus does not merely internalize his mission, but “his ‘I’ is identical with it.”91 Historically, Jesus both knows himself as the Son who is sent, but also knows that his mission involves a “not yet” that lies ahead. Thus the mission involves his existence as such, and a concrete hour that cannot be reduced to his existence. Consequently, Jesus’ life as the one sent is a movement toward

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90 Ibid., 168.
91 Ibid., 167.
this “not yet” in such a way that his historical existence becomes the enactment of his filial obedience as the movement toward his hour. Several scholars have already shown the depths to which Balthasar understands the fulfillment of Christ’s “hour” as the ultimate revelation of the Triune life of love, as we touched upon in the previous chapter.\textsuperscript{92} In order to focus on Balthasar’s considerable contribution, we can now focus on the concrete life of Jesus \textit{in via} is an exercise of his filial agency, though this is only intelligible in light of the Cross.

Once again, Balthasar turns to Christ’s temptation by the devil. Reflecting on how Jesus defeated temptation, Balthasar writes that Jesus is shown “a world that in all seriousness offers him other ways of carrying out his mission” apart from the will of the Father. Balthasar argues that Jesus “reflects on his mission and sees them as inappropriate.” This judgment is because when Jesus sees his mission he does not simply see an achievable \textit{telos} that can be served by multiple means, but “his gaze discerns the Father who is behind it.” His mission is not a set of objectives, but is a gift from the Father that Jesus receives and pursues in “filial freedom.”\textsuperscript{93}

Balthasar’s approach to Jesus’ missional self-consciousness thus concerns the articulation of Christ’s \textit{filial} consciousness. In his consciousness, Jesus is aware of both his being the Son and the relationship to the Father that is expressed and fulfilled in the mission at hand. As Balthasar’s interpretation of the temptation narratives show, Jesus

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does not consider it enough to do what the Father has commissioned him to do – i.e., the specific ends of the mission itself. Rather, he sees the fulfillment of this mission as expressing or enacting his relationship to the Father.

When he speaks of the obedience of Christ in the temptation narratives, Balthasar does not simply mean a formal obedience to the divine law. Instead, he means the Son’s obedience to the Father’s commission, and Jesus’ consequent desire to fulfill his mission in a filial way. To Jesus, there is no telos of Jesus’ mission apart from the Father – he cannot secure the end the Father desires through his or the devil’s machinations. For Jesus, the fulfillment of his mission is univocal with his desire to love the Father, and so he cannot contrive his own way to make the mission successful. He receives the mission in filial love and in order to maintain that expressed devotion, he follows this mission in filial obedience.

Now we can better see how the concrete human experiences of Jesus is impactful for Balthasar’s Christology. The concrete human life of Jesus occurs in a world that presents opportunities to contrive his mission’s success apart from union with the Father’s will. But, it also presents opportunities to choose a life of filial obedience and love, which Jesus does according to his perfection as Son. Consequently, as the free will of Jesus elects obedience to the Father’s will, he exercises his filial identity and deepens it: “the more the Son unites himself with the Ground from which his person and mission simultaneously spring forth, the better he understands both his mission and himself.”

For Balthasar, there is no need to “agonize” over the distinction between the divine and human self-consciousness of Jesus. Because the union of the Incarnation occurs in the person of the Son, the self-consciousness in both natures is united in filial

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94 Ibid., 169.
identity. Jesus understands his life as “expressing God’s Fatherhood through his entire being” to such degree that he does not ask ‘Who am I’ but knows himself in the Father’s “this is my beloved Son.” The connecting point here is that it is precisely in his filial reality that the Son reveals the Father. He “expresses” the Father by enacting his Sonship and filial love in obedience. Hence, since the Incarnate Son expresses filial love and obedience in every moment of his temporal life by conforming to the Father’s mission, so too we must conclude that Jesus “does not reveal the Father merely from time to time; he reveals him in every situation of his life.” Put differently, Jesus does not reveal the Father only in extrinsic, “objective” acts such as miracles or special teachings - his subjective existence as Son is the objective testimony to the Father’s love.

Here again, Balthasar emphasizes “every situation” of Jesus’ life. For him, it is important to recognize the dynamic temporality of the Incarnation, especially regarding Jesus’ self-consciousness. Balthasar takes specific issue with St. Thomas’ position that Jesus possessed perfect knowledge such that he had no reason to learn from human beings, but only learned through empirical experience of things. Balthasar thinks this overlooks an essential, “elementary” part of human nature: “unless a child is awakened to I-consciousness through the instrumentality of a Thou, it cannot become a human child at all.”

This concept is profoundly important for Balthasar’s theology in general, but especially for appreciating his approach to Christ’s filial consciousness. Pascal Ide argues

95 Ibid., 172.
96 Cf. Beaudin, 74-94.
97 TD 3, 173.
98 Ibid., 175.
that Balthasar’s philosophical insight into the mystery of being leads him to a distinctive ontology, centered on a quadruple distinction in being.\textsuperscript{99} The first movement of the four-fold distinction is the dynamic between the mother and the child. Balthasar notes that for human beings, there is an “archetypal identity” based on their non-identity: the child’s “‘I’ awakens in the experience of a ‘Thou’: in its mother’s smile.”\textsuperscript{100} The mother’s smile is the first moment we become aware of our ontological distinction from our mother, for we can receive a smile and return it as well. Hence the child is awakened to awareness of her existence through the encounter with maternal love.

In Christological terms, this principle means that Jesus’ filial consciousness is not a static identification with his being sent by the Father. Since it is the exercise of filiality in human nature, Jesus can also (and must be) “awakened” to his self. In particular, Mariology becomes an fortuitously important point of impact. In the Incarnation, the eternal Son assumes flesh as an earthly son to Mary. Balthasar’s theme of the fourfold distinction of being shows the convenientia of this, since it is the encounter with the mother that awakens the son’s understanding of himself. For Jesus, this “I”-consciousness developed in his encounter with Mary is not simply an awareness of his human existences, but of his filial existence.

There are two reasons for this. First is because Mary’s motherhood is Virginal, i.e., is itself the gift of the Father. Jesus’ mission “has no conceivable beginning” – his awareness of his existence does not point back to the human act of procreation, but to the Spirit’s visitation upon Mary. Consequently to be “awakened” to consciousness by Mary


\textsuperscript{100} \textit{GL} 5, 616.
already involves being awakened to his filial existence in both modes. However, we must also account for Mary’s life as “Daughter of Zion,” her dedication to and participation in the life and tradition of Israel. Balthasar emphasizes that Mary actualizes a “handing-on of the religious tradition” of Israel, initiating Jesus into the Word of God as given in the covenant. This is essential because the gift of election to Israel and the traditions of the people in covenant with YHWH cannot be merely tossed aside or circumvented by the Son. For, “he must accept this earth-grown ‘wisdom’ as a form…of his Father’s will and providence.”

Because of Mary’s unique elect motherhood, Jesus’ earthly sonship leads directly into a self-consciousness of his mission as Son. By learning from his mother the traditions of his people, Jesus becomes aware not simply of a cultural identity and praxis, but of the proclamation of the Word, which he himself is. This is why Balthasar moves with such emphasis saying, “Jesus undergoes an historical learning process with regard to his fellow men and their tradition, but essentially this is paralleled by an inward learning whereby he is initiated more and more deeply into the meaning and scope of his mission.”

Uniquely for Jesus, to hear the Word proclaimed is to come to know himself – to grow as a son of Israel is to come more and more deeply to the understanding of the “broadest imaginable horizons” of his life as the Son.

Following the Johannine tradition, Balthasar develops this insight of Jesus’ encounter with the Word more explicitly in terms of Jesus’ discourses regarding the Father and the Son. Jesus speaks of passing on from the Father, of giving what is from the Father. From this, Balthasar concludes that

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101 *TD* 3, 177.

102 Ibid., 179. Emphasis original.
It is really the case, therefore, that he understands the Word he hears from God to be identical with himself. He receives himself from the Father—both once for all and in an eternal and temporally ever-new ‘now.’ He gives thanks to the Father for the Word that is one with himself, and he proclaims both together: he is the Word proceeding from the Father, but at the same time he really is the Word. And, in his temporal consciousness, he experiences this gift of himself (from the Father’s hand) as timeless (as the absolute ‘I am’ utterances make plain).103

The importance of the foregoing for this dissertation is that Balthasar argues that Christ’s temporal human life involves concrete acts and encounters. Whether it lies in deciding how to go about fulfilling his mission or in his encounter with his people’s tradition, Jesus’ obedience is filial, but this obedience also deepens his filial awareness. In the temptation narratives, Jesus’ obedience signifies a concrete choice to act out his filial love for the Father, and so that obediential act becomes an expression of his filial identity. With regard to his relationship to Mary, Jesus’ “awakening” to existence and initiation into the tradition of Israel both constitute an encounter with his identity as the eternal Son.

For Christ, God’s Word is not an external law, but it is the law of his being— he is this Word. As a Jewish man who is the Incarnate Son, Jesus’ obedience to the law coincides with his existence as the Son. This means, then, that Jesus is not merely the obedient Son, but that his obedience flows from the fact of his being the eternal Son. It is a temporal necessity in the sense that his being the Son economically involves and requires the expression of the eternal Trinitarian love in terms of absolute obedience.

3.4. “Inverted” Obedience: The Holy Spirit in Christ’s Filial Obedience

The emphasis on the temporal aspects of mission places obedience at the forefront for expression of Christ’s filial existence. After showing us the importance of Christ’s

103 Ibid., 180.
historical consciousness and the concrete obedience required because of this, Balthasar then deepens this theme by returning to the Trinitarian aspects of his missional Christology. However, this time he is concerned with a unique aspect of the economic Trinity concerning the filial existence of Jesus in obedience: the “Trinitarian inversion.”

As we have seen, Balthasar argues that as the Son, Jesus’ existence is defined by receiving from the Father and not claiming anything for his own. In one sense this results in an “ignorance” on the part of Jesus: he does not desire to know the “facts” of his hour, but only to know the Father has commissioned him for this hour. I argued above that partially, this can be read as a novel response to the immanent eschatological expectation matrix of Albert Schweitzer, et al., by relocating Jesus’ “ignorance” in his perfections as Son. But there is more, for Balthasar takes the “ignorance” of Jesus to be a profoundly revealing moment of the Trinitarian relations in the economic act of the Incarnation.

If Jesus’ life is fundamentally an expression of obedience to his mission – which for Balthasar, it surely is – there is an important moment of distinction between the Father’s sending and the Son’s acceptance. Balthasar argues that at this distinction, “we discern an essential poise, an essential communication between Father and Son, which can only be the operation of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{104} On one level, this is the economic translation of the immanent Trinitarian principle, that within God there is an “infinite distance” that is bridged by the Spirit. On another, it is an economic corollary to the Son’s nature as “active reception” of the Godhead.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{105} Javier Prades López, “¿Existen dos economías: una del Hijo y otra del Espíritu? Reflexiones à partir de la triología de H. U. von Balthasar,” Revista Española de Teología 65 (2005): 515-48. Lopez’ article argues that Balthasar’s approach to the Spirit and the Son, including the Trinitarian inversion, provides a vastly important resource for affirming the unity of the economy, which is called into question
Balthasar develops Trinitarian inversion by first describing an essential passivity implicit in the Church’s creeds. Because the Incarnation is due to the work of the Spirit (“conceived by the Holy Spirit”), the Son does not bring about the Incarnation followed by the Spirit acting upon this work. Rather, the Spirit is active in the process of the Incarnation, and the Son assents to the Incarnation. Because of this “[the Son’s] soteriological obedience starts with the Incarnation itself.” Starting with the creedal formulations of the Holy Spirit’s role in the Incarnation, Balthasar thus develops an account in which the order of the immanent Trinitarian processions is economically inverted, and obedience lies at the heart of this dynamic.

This point must be carefully clarified, since it shows the depths to which Balthasar’s thought concerns filial obedience not thematically, but essentially. First and foremost, we must keep in mind Balthasar’s emphasis that the Incarnation is a Trinitarian decision. It is not = the Father alone conceiving the plan for the salvation of creation and sends the Son like a general commands his legions. This secures the most necessary foundation that the Son’s obedience to the Spirit in the Incarnation cannot be read as a form of essential priority on the part of the Spirit, an imperfection in the Son, or an inequality between the persons. Rather, this obediential structure occurs within the Triune God’s decision and the singleness of the divine will.

Following Walter Kasper, Balthasar criticizes St. Thomas’ formulation of the economic Trinity. Aquinas had stated that the order of the economic Trinity must follow the order of the immanent Trinity. Since the Logos’ procession from the Father

by soteriologies of world religions. Hence, the Trinitarian inversion must be seen in the light of Balthasar’s attempt to speak to the unity of the oikonomia, specifically as pointed toward the Cross of Christ.

106 TD 3, 184.
personally precedes the Spirit (*filioque*) – though not chronologically – the missional proceeding of the Spirit (to bestow habitual grace on Christ) must follow the Son (i.e., the Hypostatic Union). Kasper argued that the Scriptural account of the Incarnation requires a modification of this perspective, arguing that the Spirit’s “sanctification of Jesus” is the “presupposition” of the Incarnation, and not a later effect. Luke 1:35, with its proclamation that the Spirit’s work in Mary’s fruitfulness is the cause (διο) of her child being the Son of God, leads Kasper to hold that “it is in the Spirit that Jesus is the Son of God.”

While Balthasar is sympathetic with Kasper’s pneumatological development, he openly questions whether it takes with due seriousness the *filial* structure of the Incarnation. He cites the following from Kasper as a key transitional node:

> The Spirit as the personal bond of the freedom of the love between Father and Son is the medium into which the Father freely and out of pure grace sends the Son and in which he finds in Jesus the human partner in whom and through whom the Son obediently answers the Father’s mission in an historical way.

To Balthasar, this indeed does help avoid a restraint on divine freedom, but does not clearly give full justice to the fact of the Son’s Incarnation. He sees in Kasper too clear of a distinction between the human nature and divine nature in the Incarnation, so that the human nature seems simply an “appropriate instrument for the Son’s historical obedience.”

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107 *ST IIIa q.7 art. 13.*


109 Ibid.

110 *TD 3*, 186.
Alternatively, Balthasar proposes that the Spirit’s role is “explicitly to overshadow the Virgin and so bring the Son into the condition of humanity.” Because it is the “bringing” of the Son into the human condition, Balthasar argues there must be an account of how the Son expresses obedience in this act. Behind the being born from the Virgin Mary under the power of the Spirit lies the Son’s obedience, which is an entrusting himself “to the activity of the Spirit in accord with the Father’s will.”\(^{111}\) Hence, the Father-Son-Spirit order of processions becomes missionally inverted to become Father-Spirit-Son.

Balthasar emphasizes that the Incarnation is a Trinitarian act, but with very clear manifestations of Trinitarian agency within it. The Son’s perfect and eternal love for the Father is communicated as obedience, and in the economy this involves obedience to the Spirit as filial obedience. Balthasar explicitly unites the Spirit’s agency to the Father, and makes this union the foundation of the Son’s obedience to the Spirit.\(^{112}\) Strictly speaking, the Son “surrenders himself” to the Father’s will in the Spirit and is in a sense a “product of the Spirit,” though not absolutely; rather because we speak of the Trinitarian Spirit, the Son’s obedience in becoming incarnate is an expression of his eternal filial love.

We can see in the initial drama of the Incarnation all the basic content that will unfold in Balthasar’s account of the Trinitarian inversion. By this, I mean the two-pronged emphasis on the filiality latent in this inversion, and the presentation of the divine will that gives this image vitality. For Balthasar, the Trinitarian inversion means

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 186.

\(^{112}\) Guy Vandeveld-Dailliére, “L’«inversion trinitaire» chez H. U. Von Balthasar,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 120 no 3 (1998): 370-83. Vandeveld helpfully clarifies that for the Balthasar, the Spirit is not the economic principle of the Son, but the Father remains in this place. We can also add that because the Spirit’s *missio* is to serve the Incarnation, the order of processions is maintained “ontologically” but is inverted “dramatically” in Balthasar, if we might allow for such a distinction.
that in the economic work, the Spirit “mediates the Father’s will to the Son.” This point is rather intricately developed along two aspects of the Spirit’s Triune life: “…he is breathed forth from the one love of the Father and Son as the expression of their united freedom—he is as it were the objective form of their subjectivity; but, at the same time, he is the objective witness to their difference-in-unity or unity in difference.”

Working out this principle can quickly become convoluted to Balthasar’s reader, so it is worth carefully laying out his intentions. In the first place, Balthasar emphasizes that the Incarnation is a Trinitarian decision, which he interprets in terms of the “subjective” dimensions. We cannot say the Father, in his umbrage at sin, decides to send the Son so that the Son and Spirit simply assent; rather the Son and the Spirit have an “equally original” self-offering in this Trinitarian decision. In terms of the economic “translation” Balthasar concludes that the “absolute, free consent” between the Father and the Son in the Incarnation is “the economic form of their common spiration of the Spirit.” Economically, then, the self-offering of the Son and the Spirit surrounds the union of the divine will – just as the obedience of the Incarnate Son expresses his eternal filial love, so too does the “mediation of the Father’s will” by the Spirit express his eternal life as the subjective reality of Triune love proceeding from the objective love of Father and Son.

In this sense, the subjective aspect of the Spirit’s eternal life points to the fact that his “mediation of the Father’s will” is the hypostatization of the divine will, i.e., the

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113 TD3, 187.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
shared will of the three Triune subjects. However, this picture of subjective unity becomes economically strained because it is a unity amid distinction. Hence, in the *oikonomía*, “the Spirit takes over the function of presenting the obedient Son with the Father’s will in the form of a *rule* that is unconditional and, in the case of the Son’s suffering, even appears rigid and pitiless.” Because of the nature of the crucifixion and Christ’s descent – which are for Balthasar inalterably characterized by Jesus’ experience of abandonment – there is a sense in which the Father’s love “can disappear.” In light of this “hiddenness” of the Father to the Son, Balthasar sees the Spirit’s manifestation of the Father’s will as somewhat of a reminder of the unity of the divine will: “this is what you have wanted from all eternity; this is what, from all eternity, we have determined!”

Later, in “Christology and Ecclesial Obedience,” Balthasar opens up the hiddenness of the Trinitarian inversion with the concept of “a priori obedience.” This term formulates the notion that Christ does not obey based on a prudential judgment of the content of his mission gathered a priori; he assents to his mission, his having-been-sent, whatsoever it may entail. Approaching this concept, Balthasar states that Jesus “neither obeys his ‘conscience,’ his ‘conviction,’ nor does he, as a man, follow the will of his own divinity”; rather, he fulfills only the will of the Father. To Balthasar, the Passion reveals the distance between the Son and the Father: “…the One who stands before us now, the man Christ, is doing the will of the Other and…both wills stand in opposition to each other in a frightening nakedness in the Garden of Olives: ‘Not my will, but thine be done.’”

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117 *TD* 3, 188.

118 “Christology and Ecclesial Obedience,” 143.
In other words, there is not so much a disagreement in wills between Christ and the Father, but a distinction, perhaps even an alienation. The Spirit, however, bridges the “infinite distance” of the Trinitarian life, seen in the oikonomia as the “leading” of Christ. In the temptation narrative, for example, Jesus is led by the Spirit and Balthasar would like us to realize that in this movement, the Spirit is presenting to Jesus the Father’s will. Moreover, Jesus’ assent to the leading of the Spirit is not based on the particular object of the leading. Rather, his assent is a priori, an acceptance of the Father’s will because it is the Father’s and is an intrinsic and universal Yes to his will.

Economically, then, the Spirit “concretizes” the Father’s will for the Son. The Spirit “drives” the Son toward his “hour” and the Son “will speak his innermost Yes to this being driven.”\footnote{119} Concomitantly, Balthasar wishes to emphasize that the Father “accompanies” the Son through the Spirit. This accompaniment by the Spirit is frightfully significant because as an expression of the Father’s accompaniment, it is an expression of paternal love. Consequently, the Son’s obedience to the Spirit is the “enactment” of his life as love “in his loving obedience.”\footnote{120}

The Trinitarian inversion thus gains for Balthasar insight that in Jesus, there is a union between “perfect objective obedience and perfect subjective love.”\footnote{121} This is because the Spirit is “departed to the Son” as both “mandate” and “its loving fulfillment.” For Jesus qualities of the human subject – “authority, independence, and responsibility” – are expressive of his Trinitarian subjective love by directing these faculties into obedience, so that they “coincide in him with absolute surrender to the loving will of the

\footnote{119}{Ibid., 144.}
\footnote{120}{Ibid.}
\footnote{121}{Ibid., 145.}
Father as the Other.” The extent of this identification can be seen in the fact that Jesus is obedient to that which is beyond him (as human) – to suffer for others. For Jesus, obedience is being obedient to the point of “being able to bear no more.” But precisely because this is beyond him and because to suffer the Passion is to undergo the suffering of abandonment, the Spirit’s role as “leading” Jesus is of vital importance to Balthasar’s theology. It is the Spirit’s presence that allows the communication of paternal love to the Son and as such reveals the character of the Son’s obedience as uniquely and utterly expressive of his filial love.

4. Conclusion

In this presentation of Balthasar’s dramatic Christology, I have sought to lay out the three fundamental ways obedience functions in this presentation. First, we have seen that Balthasar identifies the immanent Trinitarian life of the Son as one of filial love and obedience, where the two are perfectly coextensive and identical. Second, we have seen this is translated economically by way of Jesus’ self-consciousness of his mission, and the fact that Jesus more deeply “enacts” his filial reality in the concrete course of his life toward his hour. Third, we have seen that with the Trinitarian inversion, Balthasar emphasizes that Jesus’ obedience is never to an abstract divine command, but is received as the Son for love of the Father, i.e., is an expression of his perfect Triune filial love.

122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
CHAPTER 5

THE CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT OF XIAO IN EARLY CONFUCIANISM

1. Introduction

The early Confucian doctrine of xiao cannot be neatly abstracted from its context to serve theological purposes. It will not do to simply refer to xiao as “filial piety” and then move on to describe how this particular theme functions in the Confucian worldview. Appreciating the theological aptness of xiao requires first understanding the conceptual world that animates it. This chapter introduces three aspects of the context of xiao. First, I provide a brief account of the historical context(s) in which Confucian authors discussed xiao, with an eye toward debates and socio-political shifts that affect and perhaps provide reason for appealing to xiao.

Second, following Henry Rosemont, Jr.’s attention to “concept clusters,”¹ I introduce and summarize five Confucian terms surrounding xiao: li 禮, ren 仁, zhong 忠, dao 道 or ren dao 人道, and tian 天. While these are certainly not the only concepts that are important to understanding xiao – for example, the Confucian understanding of education (jiao 敎) is essential – they suffice to allow for the interpretation I present in

this dissertation. Also, these sketches are far too brief to be comprehensive, and only allow the reader enough background to understand how these terms are used in the following chapters. The final section is a contextualization of how xiao is used in this dissertation. Because I describe xiao as a “virtue” this language needs specificity, gained here through a discussion of the debate over whether Confucianism is a virtue ethics tradition, and how my consideration of xiao as virtue compares to the arguments in this debate.

2. *The Historical Context of Xiao*

Early Confucians speak of xiao in different historical contexts for different ends. Although I argue that the Confucian tradition is coherent as one continual discourse from Confucius to the Han authors, this does not mean it is without historical dynamism. John H. Berthrong, in response to criticisms of Confucianism as a stagnant tradition, identifies six epochs of “transformation,” the first two of which are relevant to this dissertation: 1) the classical period (from Shang to late Zhou China, and 2) the Han dynastic period, marked by the turn to commentary and correlational cosmology. As this division is convenient, we will use these markers as a guide to the historical context of xiao.

The classical period of Confucian thought arose during the Zhou dynasty. Zhou China was founded in 1045 BC by the concerted efforts of King Wen, King Wu, and King Wen’s brother, known as the Duke of Zhou. The Zhou succeeded the Shang dynasty (known to Confucius as the Yin), from which we have the earliest archaeological evidence of Chinese culture and writing. Confucian historiography held that the Zhou was founded because of the wickedness of the last Shang ruler Zhou Xin, and that the

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Zhou dynasty was a legitimate and necessary break for the purpose of maintaining continuity with the virtuous heritage of the early Shang. For Confucians, the Zhou dynasty was not seen as an abandonment of Shang life, culture, and values, but was a continuation of it, and as such was a continuation of the very first dynasty, the Xia.

Confucius (551-479 BC) was born during the latter stages of the Zhou dynasty (called the Eastern Zhou, due to the eastward relocation of the capital to Lo-yang in 722 B.C.), which is split into two eras: the Spring and Autumn period (chunqiu 春秋; 722-481 B.C.), and the Warring States period (zhanguo 戰國; 480-221 B.C.). The Eastern Zhou was a tumultuous period, marked by the slow, consistent decay of Zhou power and practices. During the late Spring and Autumn period, individual states were beginning the process of asserting their own authority over Zhou leadership, and these tensions would increase during the Warring States period. At stake for Confucius was whether or not the Zhou way would continue. Confucius saw the Zhou institutions and ritual practices as key to moral and political flourishing, and the decline of Zhou power—which created vacuums of authority that led to violence and disorder—was not only a threat to a particular government, but to human flourishing and the moral order.

Against this backdrop, Confucius lived as part of a class of literati known as the Ru 儒, who especially emphasized study of the ancient classics of the earlier Western Zhou such as the Book of Changes (Yijing 易經), The Odes (Shijing 詩經), and the Book

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3 E.g., Analects 3.14: “The Zhou dynasty is led by the ways of the two preceding generations [the dynasties of the Shang and Xia]; how wonderful is its cultural refinement! I will follow the Zhou.”

4 Edward Shaughnessy, Before Confucius: Studies in the Creation of the Chinese Classics (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997). Shaughnessy defends the thesis that these classics were indeed written in the Western Zhou period, rather than later Zhou interpolations, which has been a trend in recent decades of scholarship.
of Documents (Shujing 書經). Confucius transformed the Ru model in at least one way by becoming a teacher, instructing young men who wanted to be officials in government (shi 士) by teaching them the various virtues and ways of reasoning necessary to help the state and thus human life flourish. The Analects is the translated title given originally by James Legge to the earliest known volume of “collected sayings” (Lun-yü 論語) of Confucius, likely compiled by his disciples who also added content throughout the late Zhou period.\(^5\)

With regard to xiao, Confucius’ attempt to assert the Zhou way of life through study of the ancient texts is of fundamental importance. Famously, Confucius saw himself as “transmitting” (shu 述) rather than “innovating” (zuo 作), which he defined as “trusting and loving the ancients” (xin er hao gu 信而好古).\(^6\) As Jiyuan Yu explains, this passage does not simply illustrate a mere “conservatism” on Confucius’ part. Rather, it shows that his method and worldview are grounded in a conception of pious service in transmitting the Way of Heaven (tiandao 天道 – see section 3.5 below).\(^7\) One reason xiao was important to Confucius was its resonance with the problems of his day, which required a response like filial piety, though in a different scale. The emphasis on loving and serving one’s parents was, for Confucius, part of the schema of “trusting and loving the ancients,” which was in turn fundamental for human flourishing. A.T. Nuyen, has

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\(^5\) E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects: Sayings of Confucius and His Successors* (New York: Columbia, 1998). The Brooks’ work has become a seminal volume in the field since its introduction. The *Original Analects* defends the Brooks’ “accretion theory,” which states that the Analects is not compiled at one time, but in discernible stages from 479-249 B.C. According to the Brooks’ theory, many of the passages of the Analects come as interpolations by Confucius’ disciples and their own schools. See Appendix 1 for specifics of the Brooks’ accretion theory.

\(^6\) *Analects*, 7.1.

even argued from a Confucian perspective that *traditio* (“traditioning”) can be seen as an exercise of filial piety.⁸

Confucius’ *xiao* was tied to the greater program of transmitting the wisdom of the ancient past. *Xiao* was both one doctrine and practice to be transmitted and a way of describing what the transmission of flourishing practices would be. After Confucius’ death, Confucian tradition holds that the disciple Zengzi instructed Confucius’ grandson Zisi, who is said to have instructed the important scholar Mencius. This lineage is notable as regards *xiao*, for Zengzi became fundamentally connected with the concept of *xiao* in later tradition. Indeed the greatest example of this connection is the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經) which at one time was thought to be written by Zengzi or Zisi. At the least, the book is structured as a dialogue between Confucius and Zengzi that plumbs the moral and cosmological depths of *xiao*. That said, describing the historical context of Zengzi is Zisi is difficult given the lack of firm historical records. Indeed, it is not really clear that the ideas about *xiao* attributed to Zengzi in texts such as the *Da Dai Liji* can be attributed to the historical Zengzi.

However, the traditional development from Zengzi to Mencius does bring us to another important and distinct historical setting against which to understand the early Confucian discourse about *xiao*. The Warring States period saw the birth of “The Hundred Schools,” and was marked by intense debate and rebuttal. Not long after the lifetime of Confucius, there arose an important teacher named Mo Di, later known by the honorific Mozi (“Master Mo”). Like Confucians, Mozi was deeply impacted by the political and social upheaval of his day, but he responded to it in a very different fashion.

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Rather than focus on the wisdom of the ancients, Mozi was interested in discovering what practices and philosophical conceptions would lead to profit or benefit (li 利) and away from disorder (luan 亂). He advocated “inclusive care” (jian ai 兼愛), having an equal concern for all people, or at least those people with whom one has social congress.⁹ Part of Mozi’s argument for impartial caring was a fierce critique of the Confucian conception of xiao.

Mozi was not an opponent of xiao itself, but of the Confucian approach.¹⁰ He argued that the Confucians emphasized loving one’s parents in a special manner, privileging them above all other relations, and Mozi thought this prioritizing led to disorder. His logic was that privileging my parents allows me to cheat and defraud others, either for the sake of my parents or because I find others intrinsically less important of care and concern than my own parents. Thus a “hierarchy of care” induced men to be uncivil toward one another, and interrupted the pursuit of benefit.

During the same time period of the Warring States, there also arose the teaching of a hermit named Yang Zhu, who advocated a philosophy of self-interest (wei wo 為我,}

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⁹ Dan Robins, “Mohist Care,” PEW 62 no 1 (January 2012): 60-91. Robins, one of the foremost authorities on Mohism, argues jian ai ought be translated as “inclusive care” rather than other popular options such as “universal love” or “impartial care.”

¹⁰ Ibid., 60, 65-67. Robins argues quite convincingly that the standard picture of Mohists as rejecting “all particularist ties, especially to family, in the interests of a radically universalist ethic” holds little truth (60). Rather, he points out that the Mozi has a very strong support of xiao and of relationships of particularity. One highlight of his argument is his conclusion of Mohism that, “there is also little if anything in it that runs contrary to ru [Confucian] moral philosophy” (66). Formally, I agree with Robins. However, I think there is a great difference between how Mohists and Confucians understood the reasons for being xiao. Hence the outlier he mentions as a point of disagreement between Mohists and Confucianists – where King Shun would have not punished in his father for a crime (Mencius 7A/35) – might not signal essential contrariety in moral teaching, but it does signal a major difference in moral philosophy.
lit. “for the sake of myself”). While we have no book of Yang Zhu to know the precise nature of his position, A.C. Graham has argued that the some chapters of the *Zhuangzi* (labeled as “Daoist” by Han compilers) reflect a Yangist perspective. Even though there are important differences between Zhuangzi and Yan Zhu according to Graham, both projects seem similar in terms of their potential critiques of *xiao*. The *Zhuangzi* is harshly critical of the social and political interests of the Confucians, and argues serving in official positions hinder perceiving and following the *dao*. Similarly, concern for the proper maintenance of human affairs – such as the father-son relationship – were restrictive of great knowledge, and thus Zhuangzi advocated the removal of oneself from such affairs. The critique of the Confucian *xiao* here is not so much whether it is proper, as much as whether it is significant for human beings to devote time and energy to the practices and rituals of filial piety.

*Mencius* 3A:14 contains the most succinct response to the Mohist and Yangist currents of the time. Mencius says that due to his isolationism, Yang Zhu “has no ruler” (*wu jun* 無君) and that Mo Di “has no father” (*wu fu* 無父). What Mencius means is the theories of Yang and Mo actually result in the sundering of necessary human relationships, and disallow the flourishing life in general. It is difficult to understand the full logic without recourse to Mencius’ debate with Gaozi about human nature (*xing* 性).

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11 Perhaps a parallel might be drawn to the “objectivist ethics” of Ayn Rand, though of course Yang Zhu would not appeal to capitalism and the mechanics of the modern liberal state.

12 See, e.g. A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1989), 170-212.


14 *Zhuangzi*, 2, 2.
According to Mencius, all human beings are born with the tendency to do good; as water will naturally flow down so humans will do what is good, unless something does violence to the nature and forces it to act in a contrary way. This is connected to Mencius’ teaching that human nature is like sprouts (duan 端) that must be cultivated to grow properly. Thus, do established practices help cultivate the roots of goodness, or do they harm these roots, damaging the natural tendencies of the human being?

In terms of xiao, these themes are vital. The naturalness of the parent-child relation and the naturalness of the peculiar love of a child for her parents (and vice-versa) are some of the “sprouts” of human morality. Mencius’ argument is that Confucian doctrine, including filial piety, provides the way to “extend” and grow these sprouts in proper ways, while the Yangist ethic of self concern and the Mohist rejection of graded love fail to cultivate these sprouts. Thus for Mencius, xiao is part of cultivating human nature, and is therefore essentially connected to his conception of the goodness of human natural tendencies.

Xunzi, teaching around the time of Mencius, was took important issue with his contemporary’s approach. Of his various teachings, Xunzi is most known for his rejection of Mencius’ argument that human nature is good, and argues it is evil (e 惡). Xunzi’s difference with Mencius bears connection to the latter’s defense of the Confucian li 禮 (ritual propriety) in the face of Yangist and Mohist critiques; Mozi, for example, had roundly rejected Confucian ritualism as not only illogical but unhelpful. Mencius’

15 Mencius 6A.2
16 See Ch. 23 (Xing E 性行) of the Xunzi.
17 See Mozi, “Against the Confucians, Book 2” 非儒下
response to these criticisms was largely based on his view of the human person and the natural “sprouts” of moral life. Although Mencius did not disavow the Confucian li, he emphasized the doctrine of ren much more exuberantly than the ritual structure.

For Xunzi, this was a vast mistake, since li were so central to Confucius’ interpretation of Ru teaching. Xunzi argues that human nature is not naturally moving toward the good, but that the li instituted by the ancient kings are meant to shape and reform base human desires toward the good. Xunzi teaches xiao is necessary, but it does not occupy a central theme in his teaching, except inasmuch as xiao is part of the ritualistic guide for human conduct inside the home, and is always thus paired with the virtue of fraternal love and responsibility (di). Consequently, Xunzi’s emphasis is on the structure of the relationship in which xiao occurs rather than the “naturalness” of the relation that Mencius stresses, and indeed this emphasis will prove pivotal for Confucian thought when transformed by Han Fei into the doctrine of the Three Bonds (see section 3.3 below). The upshot here is that xiao became part of a discourse not only about the home life, but about anthropology and the natural tendencies of the human being to be moral.

Soon after Xunzi, or perhaps during his lifetime, the state of Qin began to consolidate power. In the year 221 BC King Zheng succeeding in founding the Qin dynasty, taking the ruling name “First August Emperor” (Shi Huang Di 始皇帝) and established the form of government that would remain in China until the rise of

18 See Ch. 19 (Li Lun) of the Xunzi.

19 E.g. Xunzi, Ch. 29 (Zi Dao), 1. Xunzi takes as his point of departure the Confucian axiom “ru xiao chu di 入孝出弟” which means “in entering, filiality; in going out, fraternity.” In Xunzi’s development of filiality he limits its scope to the father-son relation without a program of “extension” found in the Mencius and Han Confucianism, and I would argue the Analects as well. Thus, he distinguishes the two spheres (home and public) fairly radically.
republicanism in the 1920s. Life was difficult for Confucian scholars during the Qin, as the new empire drew heavily upon the Legalist philosophies of Han Fei and Shang Yang. As part of this preference for Legalism, the Qin instituted the practice of the burning of Confucian books and the suppression of the tradition.\textsuperscript{20} Thankfully, for the Confucians at least, Shi Huang Di’s successors lacked his strength and talent, and the dynasty would last less than two decades.

In 210 B.C., the Han dynasty was founded and Confucian fortunes changed dramatically, eventually becoming the “official” philosophy of the empire. This fact has driven many interpreters to dismiss the importance of Han thought, seeing it as more state-supporting than truth-seeking. Such views are, however, unwarranted and belie a Western suspicion of the state – for Han Confucians, unlike modern democrats, the state was a necessary sphere of human flourishing rather than an obstacle to it. In any case, the Han context meant that now the way the Confucian tradition engaged the political would face a necessary transformation. While Confucius himself was never given public office and Mencius was a moderately successful peripatetic sage without official position, Han Confucians found themselves within the political structure and having to perpetually work for its benefit.

This meant that the political and philosophical conflicts of the Warring States period required mediation. Texts such as the \textit{Huainanzi} and \textit{Lü-shi Chun Qiu}, often called “syncretic,”\textsuperscript{21} exemplify this mediation, drawing upon themes and principles from


\textsuperscript{21} Several texts were categorized as \textit{zajia} 雜家 “the mixed school” by historians of the later Han and successive periods. The English “syncretic” implies a pejorative (and chiefly religious) sense that is not quite apt for the \textit{zajia} texts such as the \textit{Huainanzi} or \textit{Lü-Shi Chun-Qiu}. 

213
across philosophical schools in order to arrive at their positions. These texts do not lose any specific philosophical flavor or character; the *Huainanzi*, for example, seems to be largely following the Daoist stream of thought. However, in spite of often clear tendencies toward certain schools, throughout the Han there is a general goal of establishing common modes of philosophical discourse.

One aspect of this discourse is an ineluctable political implication of all philosophical thought, and indeed this becomes extremely important for the Han Confucian use of *xiao* (see section 3.3 below). Additionally, the turn to “correlative thinking”\(^{22}\) or the “correlative cosmology” that predominated during the Han period has important effect. In Han China, this especially refers to the rise of a common philosophical grammar surrounding the paired concepts *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, as well as the five phases (*wu xing* 五行). *Yin* and *yang* are taken from the pre-Confucian classic, the *Yijing*, a divination manual explaining the vacillations and movement of the cosmos through *yin* and *yang*. This pair became important in identifying how various phenomena correlate, and function in the Han as groups of complementary opposites.\(^{23}\) Many attempt to use the structure of *yin* and *yang* as evidence that Chinese thought is harmonious as

\(^{22}\) John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 1. Henderson provides what I have found is one of the best and succinct definitions of correlative thinking: “Correlative thinking in general draws systematic correspondences among aspects of various orders of reality or realms of the cosmos, such as the human body, the body politic, and the heavenly bodies. It assumes that these related orders as a whole are homologous [having same proportion or rational structure, *homo-logos*], that they correspond with one another in some basic respect, even in some cases that their identities are contained within the other. Correlative thought thus differs from analogy, metaphor, and symbol, which seldom refer systematically to larger orders or domains.”

opposed to the dualistic West, appealing to the latter’s antithetical oppositional constructs such as “good and evil.” But this is an unhelpful distortion of the Western concepts that in turn muddles the Chinese - correlative cosmology is simply an explanation of causation and the movement of the cosmos, and is not a claim about all opposition being complementary.


25 Graham, *Yin and Yang*. Graham and others juxtapose the Chinese correlative thinking to Western correlative thinking, arguing that in the latter, there is an intrinsic superiority to one term of the correlation that must “overcome” the other. As example, Graham takes from Derrida the correlates “signified/signifier, speech/writing, reality/appearance, nature/culture, life/death, good/evil.” He then posits the Western view, following David Hall and Roger Ames, as seeing that one term of a correlate A is conceivable without B, but not B without A. The example of this he cites is “for Westerners there could be God without world, reality without appearance, good without evil” (65). Stating the comparison in this way has several fundamental flaws. First, it is indebted to a Modern view of the world, which sees a fundamental opposition between transcendent and immanent reality (Kant) – even if Plato can be charged with such a division, there remains Aristotle’s hylomorphism, which states Being depends upon beings as well as the converse. When it comes to intra-mundane phenomena such as day/night, male/female, and even life/death (to a degree, since this also has a theological and supernatural significance) fundamental lines of Western tradition hold them as complementary: see Gen. 1, or Paul’s use of the corporal imagery in Corinthians. The notion of opposites that complement and are equally necessary (body/soul, male/female, etc.) actually do appear throughout the Western tradition, though these are admittedly muted after the Enlightenment, which divides the transcendent from the immanent for the sake of securing a place for “reason” apart from faith.

Second, there is in this argument the commingling of philosophical and theological principles. To set the relation between God/world or good/evil alongside male/female and day/night is a profound error that has failed to understand the uniqueness of these relations. In terms of the first, the sense in which Christianity speaks of God’s otherness of the world is not a comparison of “opposites” precisely because the cosmos is dependent upon God for its existence. This relationship is not a correlation of opposites, but the relation of necessary and contingent, of cause and effect, of sustainer and sustained, of the ineffable and the called into existence. As St. Thomas puts it, “in God, relation to the creature is not a real relation; whereas the relation of the creature to God is a real relation” (*ST* Ia q. 45 a. 3 ad obj. 2). In other words, we can imagine God without the world because God is the source of the world, and furthermore God does not “overcome” the world because he already has majesty over it as its creator. The correlative relationships of inner-worldly phenomena are profoundly dissimilar to this relation, and to cast them alongside one another is to simply obfuscate terms. A better analogy of this relationship is whether one can imagine one’s parents being infertile and not having children, which of course can be imagined in a *yin-yang* cosmology. The relation between God and the world simply is not fitting to the same correlation of day/night, man/woman pairs that *yin-yang* cosmology draws upon.

A third argument pertains to the problem of good/evil as a pair of opposites. This concept pair is conveniently left out of Graham’s listing of *yin-yang* pairs (see *Ibid*, 331), and for good reason. The Christian understanding of good and evil is not as a correlative or antithetical pair of opposites, it is rather the relation of position and negation. For example, according to St. Augustine, evil is the privation of the good and an evil thing is so not because it is opposed to the good, but because it has lost or negated goodness. Similarly, St. Thomas speaks of goodness as the perfection of a thing, and evil the aspects of imperfection. To this we can say that a Chinese thinker would never argue for the necessity of both a thing and its negation. The desire to juxtapose the transcendental arc of Western thought to some “closed”
In terms of the Han Confucian understanding of *xiao*, the turn to correlative cosmology allows for the exploration of *xiao* in ways implicit but undeveloped in earlier stages. Though not all Confucian authors of the Han emphasize the correlative approach to their reading of *xiao*, we find texts that conceive of *xiao* within this web of metaphysical and cosmic processes. Thus, for Han Confucians, *xiao* was not merely a construct of particular human communities, but participates in the very movement of the cosmos. In this way, *xiao* is ushered into a form of thought in which the immediate family setting of *xiao* is transcended (though not extirpated or abandoned) and the cosmic meaning of filiality is explored.

This very brief historical background has simply aimed to give the reader a thumbnail sketch of the context of *xiao*, and of course has left much unexplored that would be significant for the Confucian tradition in general. More expansive histories are available to the interested reader,\(^{26}\) and worth investigation. In the subsequent chapters on *xiao*, we will occasionally revisit the historical setting and give greater specificity where necessary. For now, however, we will consider the conceptual context of *xiao* and its function in the Confucian tradition.

### 3.1 Conceptual Context: Li

The immanence of Chinese thought is established on unsound grounds of categorical confusion. It is better to simply say that correlative thinking explores the existence of complementary opposites (that all rational people would have to understand as complementary, at least in some respect) as they can be arranged in an explanation of causes, and not pretend that this worldview is in fundamental opposition to Western (esp. Christian) cosmology.

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216
The term *li* 禮, often rendered as “ritual” or “ritual propriety,” is one of the most central concepts in Confucianism, corresponding to the order of ritual practices in the negotiation of various forms of social life. Antonio S. Cua has argued that *li* comprises three dimensions: the moral, the aesthetic, and religious, signifying the difficulty of describing *li* in unitary terms.\(^{27}\) This problem is exacerbated because among the various texts of the tradition, one can find a great diversity in defining *li* – indeed the *Analects* offers no definition of the term – and thus finding a general description can be difficult. The *Shuowen Jiezi* (the earliest extant dictionary of Chinese) defines *li* by the character *lǔ* 履, which can refer to the act of walking or particular forms of conduct, implying walking a (ceremonially) prescribed path. The *Shuowen* adds that this form of conduct is “the means by which one serves the spirits to obtain blessings” (*suo-yi shi shen zhi fu* 所以事神致福). Hence, *li* corresponds to some form of conduct including ceremony for the purpose accruing benefit, though not necessarily material.

As Ruiping Fan points out, early Confucians understood a distinction between two classes of ritual: “minute rituals” (*qu li* 曲禮) and “ceremonial rituals” (*yi li* 儀禮). The former denotes “everyday small behavior patterns, such as various Confucian quasi-ceremonial patterns, decorum, etiquettes, and customs.” The latter are rites requiring liturgies and observances such as capping, wedding, burying, mourning, and sacrificing.\(^{28}\) Recently Michael Ing showed, however, that not all early Confucians thought all rituals legitimate in the same degree. According to Ing, the *Liji* contains at least two distinct


interpretations of the nature of *li* as ritual. First there is a body of “restrictive theories of *li*” which understand *li* as “restricted to the performance of named ceremonial circumstances distinct from everyday affairs.” On the other hand are “expansive theories of *li*” which sees *li* as corresponding to ceremony, but also to quotidian aspects of daily life.\(^{29}\)

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest the conception of *li* is quite dynamic for early Confucianism precisely because it was undergoing transformation from the Shang antecedents. Because of the transition in views of the high deity from the Shang to the Zhou dynasties, Edward G. Slingerland argues that *li* transforms as well:

Shang ritual consisted primarily of sacrificial offerings to the spirits of the ancestors, and the main concern was that the sacrifices were performed properly – that the food and drink offered were of sufficient quality, that the proper words were intoned, etc. By Zhou times, the scope of ritual had grown significantly, encompassing not only sacrificial offering to the spirits, but also aspects of the Zhou kings’ daily lives that we might be tempted to label as ‘etiquette’: the manner in which one dressed, took one’s meal, approached one’s ministers, etc.”\(^{30}\)

Across the Confucian tradition we find several conceptions of *li* and its role in the flourishing life. However, coupling Fan’s *qu li* and *yi li*, along with Ing’s use of “restrictive” and “expansive” captures the range of options neatly. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will treat both conceptions of *li* as complementary. Partially this is because even though the nature of *li* is debatable for Confucians, the fact that these two interpretations exist side by side in the textual tradition suggests we cannot do without

\(^{29}\) See Ing, *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 21-23. Ing also helpfully notes that in the *Liji* – and I would add seemingly for the entire early Confucian tradition – the concept of “ritual” is not limited to aspects of *li*, but also includes music (*yue* 楽) and regulations (*fa* 法). My own consideration of *li* follows Ing in having a broader understanding of ritual. See ibid, 19-20.

either.\footnote{This is a hermeneutic move applied from the Christian tradition, which holds together the necessity of both creation accounts in Genesis 1-2, as well as the four distinct testimonies to the gospel of Christ by the evangelists. One should remember the Church rejected Tatian’s Diatessaron because it dissolved the distinctions of the four testimonies that must be held together, instead of resolved.} Xiao in particular involves both ceremony and custom. However, \textit{li} does not simply refer to the actions themselves, but also the dispositions and attitudes in performing the ritual; hence the translation “ritual propriety.” Taken in this ineluctable sense, \textit{li} means the care for, attention to, and proper practice of various rituals whether liturgical or conventional.

One more aspect of \textit{li} is important to the rituals of filiality in particular. Herbert Fingarette argued that \textit{li} primarily is the working out of human community, meaning quotidian customs (the “secular”) become constitutive of human existence (“sacred”).\footnote{Herbert Fingarette, \textit{Confucius: The Secular as Sacred} (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 1972), see 1-17.} Due to the influence of American Pragmatism, interpretations such as Fingarette’s have become popular, seeing \textit{li} as (almost) exclusively existentialist or symbolic.\footnote{Howard J. Curzer, “Contemporary Rituals and the Confucian Tradition: A Critical Discussion.” \textit{JCP} 39 no 2 (June 2012): 290-309. Curzer, for example, defines \textit{li} as “essentially symbolic and evocative” attempts to “transform people’s thoughts and feelings through symbolic actions” (292). What is ignored is that rituals have an intrinsic transcendental openness.} However, Confucian rituals are not simply about human existence: they are practiced at proper seasons and directed toward spirits, they are connected to the historical dynasties and practices, and in the case of \textit{xiao}, connect people to deceased ancestry. There are profoundly metaphysical elements to the Confucian \textit{li}, wherein humans encounter the motion of the cosmos, history, the realm of spirits, and the numinous state of the deceased. Even though Confucians such as Xunzi clearly contextualize \textit{li} in human nature, we ought not ignore the transcendental features of Confucian rituals, not least the filial ritual acts of mourning and sacrifice analyzed in chapter 7.
3.2 Conceptual Context: Ren

Unlike *li*, *ren* has a fairly straightforward application in Confucian texts. The pronunciation of the word is paranomastically\(^{34}\) related to the term for “human” (*ren* ⼈), as is the graph 仁, composed of the radical for “human” on the left and that for the number two on the right. Both graphically and phonetically, the word suggests human relations. In a classic essay on the evolution of the Confucian *ren*, Wing-tsit Chan argued that Confucius had transformed the notion from its earlier uses, in which *ren* referred primarily to the kindness of a ruler toward his people. Confucius, however, taught that *ren* was a possibility for all people to cultivate. More importantly, while Confucius did treat *ren* as a particular virtue of benevolence or kindness toward others, he also understood it as virtue in general, and the foundation of ethics itself.\(^{35}\) To this point,

34 Roger T. Ames, “Paronomasia: A Confucian Way of Making Meaning,” in *Confucius Now: Contemporary Encounters with the Analects*, ed. David Jones (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2008), 37-48. Ames defines a paronomastic definition as providing meaning for a word through phonetic or semantic associations (38). For Ames, this is part of his vision of the Confucian society as one that “makes meaning” i.e., the constructed nature of human society (and human “nature,” though Ames rejects essentialism). While I am critical of the existential implications of Ames’ project, his point about the importance of paronomasia for Confucian meaning is well placed and well-taken.

35 Wing-tsit Chan, “The Evolution of the Confucian Concept of *Jen*” *PEW* 1 no 4 (Jan. 1955): 295-319. Chan’s thesis has been challenged on some grounds, however. Luo Shiron has challenged Chan’s conclusion that Confucius taught *ren* was “for all” but rather argues it was understood as a “leadership virtue” (see Luo, “Confucius’s Virtue Politics: Ren as Leadership Virtue” *AP* 22 no 1 [Feb. 2012]: 15-35). In a different direction, R. A. H. King has recently argued there are actually few reasons from the text to consider *ren* as a virtue in the *Analects* (see King, “Ren in the Analects: Skeptical Prolegomena” *JCP* 30 no 1 [March 2012]: 89-105); whether this holds true for Mencius or Neo-Confucian developments that Chan elucidates, King does not say. King’s point is a subtle one, and helpful in showing the distinction between (in this case) Platonic theories of virtue and whatever purpose *ren* serves in the *Analects* (King emphasizes the ambiguity of *ren* in this text). Yet for the purpose of a broad introduction such as this one, I find it helpful to consider *ren* a virtue or perfect virtue itself, provided the reader keep in mind it is an approximation rather than a substantive argument for Confucianism as a virtue tradition – see section 6 below for discussion on this point.
James Legge often rendered ren as “perfect virtue,” and Slingerland translates it as “the Good” or “Goodness.”

The centrality of ren became increasingly clear through Confucian tradition, even while the dynamics of the concept morph from writer to writer. However, one constant is that ren stands in relation to the concept of xiao in fundamental ways. In Analects 1.2, Confucius’s disciple Youzi 有子 teaches that xiao and di (“fraternal affection and responsibility”) are the root (ben 本) of ren. This doctrine would be worked out over history, especially in response to the Mohist doctrine of “impartial care” (jian ai) and harsh critiques of the Confucian concept of “graded love” (ai you cha-deng 爱有差等).

In terms of ren, the Mohist could appreciate the emphasis on ethical commitments to others, but thought that the call to be ren was undermined by the Confucian emphasis that one should love one’s parents greater than one loves others.

In general, the Confucian response to such concerns was that without loving one’s parents specially, it is impossible to love others. Thus, the affection practiced and perfected in xiao was necessary for the ability to love others. Various authors work this relation out differently, and many modern interpreters will describe a “diffusion” theory to the tradition, in which xiao begins as love to parents that his then extended outward to


38 Kim-chong Chong, Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2006), 19-34. Chong argues that the general understanding of how ren functions in early Confucianism is filtered largely through a Mencian lens (provided, of course, by Zhu Xi). In the Mencius, ren is discussed in terms of xing 性 (“human nature”) and thus refers to “an original source of goodness residing in the heart-mind” (19). However, the Analects does not have the context of xing – Confucius is more interested in the practice of ren rather than its anthropological implications (see 24ff.). Hence, the way ren is discussed in the tradition depends as much upon the particular concerns of the author as it does some generic foundation of the concept.
Regardless of how this relationship is configured, it is clear that Confucianism argues for an intimate and intrinsic link between the virtue of ren and filial devotion. Therefore, xiao is not relevant only to the family, but impacts broader social responsibilities and Goodness in general.

3.3 Conceptual Context: Zhong

In its simplest meaning, the word zhong signifies “loyalty” and is often used politically regarding the ruler-minister relation (jun-chen 君臣). The graph 忠 is composed of the word for “center” or “middle” (zhong 中) over the radical for the heart-mind (xin 心), giving the impression of a heart unswayed, and thus loyal. The Shuowen defines zhong as jing 敬, “respect” or “reverence.” Combining these aspects, zhong is primarily the attitude of fidelity in terms of respect for one’s superior. Notwithstanding the use of zhong in passages such as Analects 4.15, it generally means loyalty in a political, and especially ministerial sense.

The term zhong became exceptionally important for the Confucian understanding of xiao in the wake of the argument in the Zhongxiao 忠孝 chapter of the Hanfeizi. There the eminent Legalist philosopher Han Fei argued that xiao is important as part of the “Three Bonds,” meaning the minister’s service to the ruler, the son’s service to the father,

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39 See, for example, Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Confucian Self-cultivation and Mengzi’s Notion of Extension” in Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi, ed. Xiusheng Liu and Ivanhoe (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), 221-41.

40 Analects 4.15 claims, through the disciple Zengzi, that Confucius’ dao is simply composed of zhong 忠 and shu 恕 (“reciprocity”). Interpreting the passage has proven difficult, for reasons too vast to summarize in a footnote. We can simply note that the meaning of zhong and shu are neither clear, nor does the passage represent the typical obvious political context of zhong. For important discussions of the text and its meaning, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Reweaving the ‘One Thread’ of the Analects” PEW 40 no 1 (1990): 17-33 and Bryan W. Van Norden, “Unweaving the ‘One Thread’ of Analects 4.15” in Confucius and the Analects: New Essays, ed. Van Norden (New York: Oxford, 2002), 216-37.
and the wife’s service to the husband are all equally necessary aspects of ordering the empire (tianxia zhi 天下治).\textsuperscript{41} According to Hanfeizi, \textit{xiao} refers to a specific aspect of social life, and its complement is \textit{zhong}, political obedience. The development of the Three Bonds creates the problem of two distinct set of necessary relations – the ruler-minister and father-son – that must be now reconciled with one another in view of their distinct necessities. Prior to Hanfeizi, when the \textit{Analects} and \textit{Mencius} discuss the relationship between political loyalty and filial piety, the tendency is to discuss it in terms of the unity of virtue,\textsuperscript{42} that filial piety and political loyalty are mutually informing and inclusive as part of the good life. There are some passages that do explore the tension between political and filial duties – such as the problem of Upright Gong in \textit{Analects} 13.18 - but this relationship is not explicitly a challenge until the Han dynasty.

During the Han, Confucian writers found the Three Bonds a helpful way of negotiating various relationships in human life. One way this negotiation happened was to speak of \textit{zhong} as a constitutive feature of being \textit{xiao}. Another way popular way was the exploration of the tension between \textit{xiao} and \textit{zhong} in the tales of filial offspring. The \textit{Han Shi Wai Zhuan} tells the tragic story of Shi She 石奢, who being fair and equitable was sent by the king on an errand. On the way, he began to pursue a murderer and discovered it was his own father, upon which he lets his father go and returns to court. Once there, Shi She places himself under the axe man to willingly suffer capital punishment, and refuses to leave even though his ruler gives him reprieve. Shi She says,

\textsuperscript{41} Hanfeizi, \textit{Zhongxiao}, 1.

\textsuperscript{42} I don’t mean to suggest here an agreement with Aristotle’s theory of the virtues, which holds that to have one virtue, one must have them all. Confucians tends to argue for the possibility of cultivating some virtues and not having others. However, this should not lead us to neglect that the various virtues are harmonious, and in this sense are part of a united structure of virtue.
“failing to conceal the father’s misdeeds, this is not xiao; failing to follow the ruler’s laws, this is not zhong.” Thus, able to fulfill neither, Shi She gives himself up to capital punishment.

A full analysis of such stories can be delayed for the next chapter. For now, what is significant is that for Han authors, xiao could not be understood or examined apart from its relationship, either in harmony or tension, with zhong. From this we might say that the negotiation of the familial and the political, and the problems therein, is a key feature of the Confucian understanding of filial piety, regardless of how this relationship is ultimately resolved.

3.4 Conceptual Context: Dao

Of the limited number of terms from Chinese philosophy that have found their way into the English lexicon, none is more widely known than dao 道. The term has been popularized for English speakers due to the introduction of a plethora of translations of the Laozi, also known as the Daodejing. Through Laozi, the term was famously appropriated by C. S. Lewis in his The Abolition of Man and has now become the single most known point of contact for theologians with Chinese philosophy. This is propitious as the term dao has been very important in Chinese Christianity as well. The earliest evidence of Christianity in China, the Xian stele, contains a Daoist-influenced teaching

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43 *Han Shi Wai Zhuan, Juan 2, 14.*

Approaching *dao* under the auspices of *Logos* is a very good place to start to understand the concept, especially for theologians. Like the Stoic *Logos*, the Chinese *dao* is similarly the force of coherence, unity and process in the cosmos, though without a primary rational character. The graph 道 is composed of the radical for *chuo* 酉 meaning “to walk” and *shou* 首 meaning “head” – D.C. Lau argues the term originally signifies a deer path.⁴⁶ Like one walks the path in the wood, the *dao* represents the course of the cosmos, though not usually in a fatalistic or deterministic way. It is simultaneously the way things are, they way they should be, and the making things as they will be.

Daoists such as Zhuangzi criticized Confucians because they focused on and explored human relations (like *xiao*), which Zhuangzi saw as an ignorance of the actual *dao*.⁴⁷ In later texts such as the *Da Xue*, Confucians responded that by studying the affairs of human life, the Confucian philosophy attends to the branches (*mo* 末) of the *dao* and this in turn allows one to discern the “root” (*ben* 本).⁴⁸ In this way, Confucians argued that to contemplate and understand the human *dao* (*rendao* 人道 or *仁道*) is to understand something significant about the nature of the *dao* itself.⁴⁹ I think it is quite fair

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⁴⁷ See section 2 above.

⁴⁸ *Liji*, *Da Xue*, 1.

⁴⁹ Leo K. C. Cheung, “The Unification of Dao and Ren in the Analects,” *JCP* 31 no 3 (September 2004): 313-27; Mary I. Bockover, “The Ren Dao of Confucius: A Spiritual Account of Humanity,” In *Confucius Now*, 189. Cheung helpfully points out that the *Analects* argues for a unification of *ren* 仁 and *dao* that grounds a reading of the union of the human *dao* and the cosmic *dao*. Bockover emphasizes that the concept of *rendao* for Confucius is not pure materialistic humanism, but rather “the human way (*ren dao*) is essentially entailed by, and coextensive with, the way of heaven (*tian dao*)”
to retroactively ascribe this conviction to the entire early Confucian tradition from the *Analects* forward. Throughout the pre-Qin to Han period, Confucians were concerned with understanding the nature and propriety of human conduct and the order of human life. This was not merely out of pragmatic concern, but stemmed from recognizing that humans participate in the cosmic dao as human beings, and thus living well is part of pursuing and expressing the universal *dao*.

The importance of this context for *xiao* is clear. *Xiao* is not limited to material relationships between family members. Rather, it concerns and reflects the order and course of the cosmos. According to Benjamin Schwartz, Confucius believed that without the *dao*, proper regulation was impossible: “in a society where the [*dao*] is absent, the families of the masses who suffer deprivation and oppression cannot be expected to realize the moral potentialities of family life.”

Hence, the connection between *xiao* and *dao* is key to understanding the former is not merely subservience, but functions within the Good. To those who have suffered under poor parents, it is vital to recognize that Confucianism exhorts *xiao* under the recognition that loss of the *dao* by one’s parents or a society in general will result in suffering for the *xiao* child (though not as a result of attempting to be *xiao* as such). Perhaps at this point better than any other, one can see that *xiao* is not merely of interest for theological ethics, but for theology in general, which can appreciate and appropriate the metaphysical and cosmological implications of *xiao* for its own reflections on the Son through whom the world is made (see Ch. 8 for further reflections on this possibility).

3.5 Conceptual Context: Tian

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50 Schwartz, 100.
The meaning of the term tian, often rendered “Heaven,” is controverted among scholars. The concern is predictable but not without justification: “Heaven” can suggest the Chinese concept of tian is nearly synonymous with the Judeo-Christian Heaven. The Christian theologian could expect nothing except for vastly different contours of these terms, since “heaven” is the state of supreme happiness comprise of sharing in the divine life and enjoying the Beatific Vision. Certainly there is no sense of tian involving this eschatological aspect, nor can tian be primarily seen as the domain of God. Yet one must keep in mind there are a variety of meanings of heaven in both the Old and New Testaments, sometimes involving simply the sky and planetary bodies, or the sphere of divine action in general.

The latter sort of flexibility obtains with the Chinese concept of tian, as several scholars attest.51 In Classical Chinese, tian can refer to among other things, the sky, the planetary realm, nature, or a deistic force that directs but also participates in the cosmos. Some scholars have attempted to clarify this last aspect by juxtaposing tian to the Western concept of the “personal God.”52 Although Robert Eno has argued that the early Confucian concept of tian is indeed a response to the loss of confidence in Tian as a divine figure who enabled the early Zhou dynasty to prosper53, this distinction of the


52 I am thinking here of the sort of argument made by Robert B. Louden in “‘What Does Heaven Say?’ Christian Wolff and Western Interpretations of Confucian Ethics” in Confucius and the Analects: New Essays, 73-93. Louden argues against the thought of those such as David Hall and Roger Ames, who argue Confucianism is a-theistic. In response, Louden argues Confucius saw tian in a “religious” sense, but not “theistic,” which he identifies with the “personal God” of Western traditions. As above, I argue this distinction is largely unhelpful, and points chiefly to the lack of theological subtlety on the part of sinologists who make such comparisons.

53 See Eno, 19-29.
“personal God” is not as helpful as it initially seems. First and foremost, the “personal God” figure of the Judeo-Christian tradition is derived from divine revelation (God as electing Other), and not natural reason. Moreover, when Greek philosophers used *theos*, they did not have in mind a “personal” God, but rather the realm of ideal forms (Plato’s *eidos*) or the unmoved mover (Aristotle). As Benjamin Schwartz points out, texts such as the *Analects* are rather ambiguous in their treatment of *tian* – it has features of both a deity and an impersonal order.

Of the multifarious aspects of *tian*, one especially impacts the Confucian *xiao*. Similar to the Greek *theos*, there is a sense in which *tian* is the divinized directing of the cosmos. Early Confucians at times speak of the *tiandao*, or *dao* of Heaven. This can mean the “course of the Heavens,” i.e., the motion of planetary bodies, but also can mean that the *dao* is Heaven’s *dao* – the Way of the cosmos is established in *tian*. Some scholars, such as David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, argue against the notion that Confucianism holds a concept of a “single, ordered cosmos,” but this position seems to primarily stem from their own process philosophical assumptions, rather than the genuine world of early Confucian texts, as can be seen evident in passages such as *Analects* 7.23.

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54 Schwartz, 122.

55 Hall and Ames, *Thinking through the Han*, 188. The notion that Confucianism does not hold to an ordered universe is on its face rather absurd – both according to reason and the texts themselves. For example, Confucians spoke of *ren* (human beings) applying to creatures who walked on two legs, organized in societal communities, and possessed capacity for language, learning, and desiring. Similarly, it recognized *niu* (cows) as animals that walked on four legs, were herbivorous, and were strong enough to assist *ren* labor such as farming, though were not pressed into this service through reasoned discourse. In short, the fact that early Confucians expected *ren* to walk on two legs and to look and act very differently from *niu* means they assumed some sort of order to the cosmos. More importantly, there is an order (such as the fact that humans have two legs and are quite less strong than cows) that is *given* to human beings, and cannot be surmised by human agency ordering the world. Early Confucians understood this, even if Hall and Ames’ a-theistic dogmatism blinds them to such brute facts.
or nearly the entire *Mencius*.\(^{56}\) Quite simply, early Confucians did perceive a givenness to the world, even if they maintained a special role of human beings to help give order to the world as well.

An even more important formula for cosmic order in early Confucianism (at the least, in the *Analects*) is the term *tianming 天命*, or “the Mandate of Heaven.” On its own, *ming* can mean something like “fate” or “destiny” and in this case, *tianming* refers to what *Tian* has destined. Within this general concept, there are two important uses of *tianming* in the early tradition. First is the sense that *Tian* has written *ming* in the universe, and this can be studied (*Analects* 2.4). Second, and most important in the *Mencius* is the ability of *tian* to *ming* the political establishment of rulers or dynasties. In both cases, the appeal to *tianming* has striking similarities to the Christian concept of the natural law. As an example, Mencius will warn rulers that they can lose Heaven’s Mandate by failing to govern justly. According to Mencius, having *ren* is intrinsic to excellent governance – one can decide against *ren* government, but cannot circumvent the order established in *tian* of effective governance, and thus non-*ren* governments are doomed to failure.\(^{57}\) Thus what *tian* has mandated is not explicit, but sewn into the fabric of existence with “natural” consequences.

This is important for *xiao* because early Confucians understood that *xiao* is part of what *tian* has established. As we saw above, Mencius’ critique of the Mohist position is that it leaves one “without a father.” This line of thought shows that as part of *tiandao* or *tianming*, *xiao* participates in the recognition and pursuit of natural order. We might say

\(^{56}\) *Analects* 7.23 – “The Master said, ‘Tian produced virtuous power in me. Is Huan Tui such a man?’”

\(^{57}\) See, e.g. *Mencius* 1A:5.
especially that Confucians recognize the family structure as intrinsic to existence itself, and thus negotiating the relations of the family properly are fundamental to discerning and practicing tianming. In this sense, cultivating xiao is a duty or obligation even though we do not become xiao by simply existing as sons or daughters.

There is much in this brief overview of the conceptual context for xiao that would need further development in order to understand each concept on its own terms. However, as regards xiao, the foregoing provides sufficient background to follow my treatment of xiao in subsequent chapters. We will have the opportunity to expand each of these five central concepts as the dissertation progresses, but for now we must attend to a final prolegomena, the question of how to see xiao as a virtue.

4. Xiao as a Virtue

Throughout this dissertation, I speak of xiao as the “virtue” of filial love and obedience. Not long ago, scholars of such repute as H. G. Creel and Donald J. Munro could speak of “virtue” in Confucian thought without offering qualification. However, over the past several decades, scholarship has taken different turns, and now necessitates certain provisos. This section qualifies my understanding of xiao as a virtue in two ways. First, I provide an overview of what is at stake in the debates regarding the language of virtue and its applicability for Confucian thought. Because this debate vacillates between concerns regarding the state of philosophical academic discourse on the one hand and textual hermeneutics on the other, it is a complex issue. Second, I show xiao is constituted by both disposition and service (shi 事), i.e., as filial love and filial obedience.

Because of this link of disposition and act, I define *xiao* as the virtue of filial love enacted in filial obedience.

As study of Chinese thought has expanded from history and Asian studies departments into philosophy programs over several decades, a contentious debate has arisen over whether (or how) Confucian ethics is concerned with “virtue.” Objectors often point out a linguistic problem, namely that there is no term in Chinese for “virtue.” The word often translated as virtue (*de* 德) more closely means the ability of a person to affect and influence others towards the good. 59 *Analects* 2.1, for example, teaches that to govern with *de* is to be like the North Star, “which remains in place and all other stars turn about it.” 60 Thus, *de* does not typically have the same function as *arête* in Greek, which has to do with an individual’s excellence in performing particular acts (Plato) or moderation towards goods (Aristotle).

Based on this difference, many scholars such as R. A. H. King have argued treating concepts such as *ren* as a “virtue” is dubious. 61 Critics such as Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. have pushed for developing a more native terminology for Confucian concepts. Ames and Rosemont (both separately and in concert) suggest developing a vocabulary for Confucianism as a “role ethics” is most true to the Confucian understanding of morality, as it emphasizes the social role and responsibility of each

59 David S. Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Bryan W. Van Norden (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1996), 17-56. Nivison complicates the issue because he emphasizes that *de* is given by *tian* and is thus “some inner kind of mental entity” (29) and shows that between the Shang and Zhou periods, the graph for heart-mind (*xin* 心) was added to the graph for *de*. This means, according to Nivison that *de* functions more like a feature of character, i.e., that the moral force one has is tied to the type of character one has or develops. In light of Nivison’s work, it seems to me those who claim the Chinese have no word for virtue has less firm ground, but I will leave that debate to sinologists to pronounce a final word on the issue.

60 *Analects* 2.1

61 R. A. H. King, “*Ren* in the *Analects.*”
person rather than excellence of an individual. 62 According to Ames, for Confucianism “any particular ‘virtue’…is a quality of conduct achieved within the specific transactions of enlightened and intelligent social living.” 63 In this, Ames provides a very important point of critique of the language of virtue ethics. For Confucianism surely does not imagine the human person as an abstract entity, but as relationally bound “role-bearing individuals,” in Rosemont’s words. 64 Hence, both Ames and Rosemont argue for a need to develop a grammar of “role ethics” in Confucianism, rather than appropriate the language and categories of virtue ethics, which they would contest are not really present in the Confucian tradition. 65

There are two chief ways to approach this critique. First, the problem of whether a term has a close corollary in another language’s lexicon is a rather weak point. The sentence “the Chinese has no word for ‘virtue’” seems obvious, just as there is actually no word for “virtue” in Greek (arête is not virtus). Paul Ricoeur reminds that language is not fixed, but only discourse. 66 That is, following Bryan W. Van Norden’s criticism of the “lexical fallacy,” simply because there is no word for X in a given tradition does not


63 Ibid., 162.


mean there is no conception of X in that tradition, it simply means the discourse
developed differently. 67

It is possible, then, for a Chinese thinker or tradition to discourse about the
realities the West calls virtues, in different terms and in different ways, but still discuss
the same fundamental faculties of the human person. 68 Indeed, it can be argued that there
is no direct corollary in Chinese for the word “role” that Ames and Rosemont prefer.
There are relationships (lun 論), positions (li 立), and appropriateness of conduct (either
yi 義 or li 禮) governed by the form of those relationships, but no simple word “role” that
covers the social responsibilities of a person. Hence, the sheer lack of presence of a term
with the same conceptual form as “virtue” is not handicapping – certainly we can
understand that arête is not the same as virtus, and yet we accept their fundamental
similarity in how they are used.

The more interesting and pressing problem lying underneath these critiques is the
conceptual equivalence of virtue. Van Norden’s position on the lexical fallacy criticizes
an important essay by Rosemont. In that essay, Rosemont argues there is no equivalent
for “morality” in Chinese, and thus we cannot speak of a tradition such as Confucianism
speaking of morality. Yet Rosemont’s point is not simply about existence of synonyms.
Rosemont understands “morality” as bound to the “concept cluster” of “‘rights-based’

67 Bryan W. Van Norden, Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy (New
York: Cambridge, 2007), 22f.

68 The problem is, this sort of move requires moving past thinking in terms of “concepts” and
instead thinking of described realities – are Aristotle and Chinese thinkers creating conceptual schemes, or
are they encountering reality? Everything depends upon how this question is answered. For a similar, and
more developed argument see Heiner Roetz, “What It Means to Take Confucian Ethics Seriously,” in
theories and principles. That is, “morality” implies the context and convictions of liberal modernity, which cannot be applied to ancient China. Although we can criticize Rosemont for failing to see past 1789 for a conception of “morality” in the West, his concern is well taken. While arête and virtus are not perfectly synonymous, they both function within similar anthropologies, and depend upon the body-soul distinction.

Chinese philosophy has ways of speaking of the outer-inner distinction (wai-nei 外內), but cannot be seen as discussing the relationship between the anima and corpus. While there are words for body (xing 形 or ti 體) and something like a soul (qi 氣 or qing 清) for which we can find analogs, the Chinese schools do not develop the relation between these parts in the way Western virtue traditions necessarily do.

This gives rise then to a more specific set of problems. Instead of focusing on whether Confucians could have understood something like “virtue,” the question is now whether virtue ethics depends upon a specific way of perceiving anthropological reality, and the organization of anthropological data. Subsequently, one challenge is whether or not it is apt to consider aspects of Confucian thought in the Western language of “virtue,” with necessary qualifications. On the other hand, we must ask whether or not Confucianism can be justly summarized and explored as a virtue ethics tradition. With regard to the second question, it is no surprise that understanding Confucianism as a “virtue ethic” has been advanced by scholars working in largely Western philosophy departments such as Van Norden, Philip J. Ivanhoe, and Stephen C. Angle. For these


70 Though Ivanhoe is now working in Hong Kong, he originally worked in the US at Stanford and University of Michigan, among others, and began advancing his positions in those departments. See Ivanhoe, Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yangming, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), and Ivanhoe, Confucian Moral Self Cultivation, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002).
scholars, there are two main concerns at stake in this debate: 1) why should Western philosophers be concerned with Chinese thought, and 2) how do such philosophers “take Confucianism seriously” 71 as a way of understanding and advancing philosophical knowledge.

A recent major step in this effort is the 2013 publication *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism*, edited by Angle and Michael Slote. 72 In this collection, a clear theme throughout is that following G.E.M. Anscombe’s famous call for a return to virtue, 73 the category of virtue has become much more important in recent Western philosophy. One product of this importance has been an emphasis on the variety of virtue traditions in the West – e.g., Slote’s work, which proliferates the volume’s footnotes, has been important for considering the virtue ethics of David Hume as a decidedly non-Aristotelian form of virtue theory. 74 At stake for these authors is whether Confucianism will be accepted as part of this variety, and thus part of the broad discourse about the ethical life. 75 To this

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71 Heiner Roetz, “What It Means to Take Chinese Ethics Seriously.” Roetz argues against both “comparatist” and “contrastist” hermeneutics in engaging Chinese philosophy, and instead argues for a “principle of eye-level heuristic.” By this, Roetz means that scholars should “give a systematic priority to those heuristic approaches that from the beginning assume a common horizon of meaning and make it possible to understand the foreign world and foreign history as part of our own world and our own history” hence, we see at the same “eye-level” with the Chinese thinkers. (here 23, emphasis added)


75 These concerns seem to me quite distinct, but not entirely separate from, the body of literature that has focused on the relation between Confucius and Aristotle, which is largely based on how each figure (or tradition) illuminates the other. See, e.g. May Sim (a student of Alasdair MacIntyre who challenges his notion of incommensurability), *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius*
point, Van Norden argues for four broad characteristics of any virtue ethic tradition: 1) an account of the flourishing life, 2) an account of “dispositions to think, feel, and act in characteristic ways,” 3) an account of ethical cultivation, and 4) a philosophical anthropology. In Van Norden’s construction, it does not matter whether the concept clusters are similar in themselves, but whether the concept clusters of virtue tradition are similar enough to each other to grant a developed discourse about ethical life.

As this brief overview shows, the question of how to determine the nature of Confucian ethics depends on several factors; for the purpose of this dissertation, I leave it suspended. Catholic theologians know virtues are real phenomena, particularly those infused through the sacraments. With regard to natural virtues, I have no doubt that Confucian thinkers perceived the same fundamental aspects of the human person that St. Thomas explored as virtues. However, I am also willing to allow that virtue traditions require a particular form of organizing anthropological data, and thus the discussion of aspects of the Confucian view as speaking of “virtue” might simply be an ad hoc adjustment of the Western mind, rather than a firm definition about the way the Confucian tradition systematizes its reflections. Put differently, the Confucian tradition can indeed enrich my understanding of the virtues from a Thomistic perspective without my having to defend that the tradition ought be classified as a “virtue” tradition.

The more vital question for my reading of xiao is whether or not it is fitting to use the concept of “virtue” to capture some of the features of filial piety in the Confucian tradition. In order to answer this question, we must first understand some of these


76 Van Norden, Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism, quote at 39.
features. Pre-Confucian texts show a variety of ways of understanding *xiao*. Much of the time, *xiao* is used adjectivally or adverbially, modifying a wide range of objects. For example, the most common use of *xiao* in the *Shijing* 詩經 (the Book of Odes, the most authoritative text for early Confucians), is to apply it to the son, referring to him as a “*xiao* son (*zi*)” (孝子), or referring to a descendant as a *xiao* sun 孝孫. Such use begs more questions than it answers. If we speak of a “filial” son, then clearly this means having the characteristic or properties of good sonship, discernible in particular ways. But what are these characteristics and how does one discern them?

The *Zhouli* 周禮 (*The Rites of the Zhou*) classifies *xiao* as a form or mode of conduct (*xing* 行) rather than a type of virtuous power (*de* 德) or skill or art (*yi* 藝). Yet elsewhere, the same text speaks of *xiaode*, of *xiao* virtuous power. Similarly, though one finds multiple attestations in the *Shijing* of *xiao* as modifying a type of sacrifice, it also modifies thinking (*si* 思), so that one can actually be said have a “filial way of thinking” (*xiao* *si*). Complicating matters even further, the *Shang Shu* speaks of a *xiao* way of nourishing one’s parents (*yang* 養) and yet also speak of *xiao* as something one possesses, like loyalty (*zhong* 忠) or virtuous power (*de*). Thus *xiao* is not exclusively applied either to physical, mental, or emotional acts. Rather, it concerns all of these aspects.

Hence, the Confucian tradition will speak of *xiao* in one sense as forms of service (*shi* 事), implying emphasis on specific acts, requiring filial obedience. Yet this is tied to the early teaching from the *Analects* that *xiao* service is distinguished by respect *jing* 敬,
and thus has an ineluctable dispositional quality of filial love. Taken together, this means that for the Confucian tradition, xiao operates at the intersection between act and disposition, between conduct and feeling, between love and obedience. Undoubtedly, the dispositional characteristics of xiao are more determinative than the actualization in service; xiao more concerns doing deeds in a particular, filial manner rather than simply doing particular actions. Yet the doing is just as vital as the attitude with which one provides a particular service.\textsuperscript{80} Xiao, then, is some power of the human person defined in both the emotional or affective disposition of the son and in acts that fulfill, perfect, and enrich this disposition.

In his discussion of xiao as a virtue, Philip J. Ivanhoe asserts a distinction between xiao as a duty (which it cannot be in his eyes) and xiao as a virtue of being grateful to one’s parents.\textsuperscript{81} However, my approach is distinct, for one because I do not find a harsh distinction between duty and virtue compelling – if virtues are habits that incline one toward the Good (presuming one believes in such a thing), then such habits are our duty as rational agents. Moreover, gratitude is only a partial aspect of xiao, the center of which I argue is filial love. Precisely because filial love is at the center of xiao, it takes unto itself the sphere of duty, yet \textit{within} love. Hence, the service (shi) of xiao is an outgrowth or outpouring of the disposition of filial love.

\textsuperscript{80} Karyn L. Lai, “Knowing to Act in the Moment: Examples from Confucius’ Analects,” \textit{AP} 22 no 4 (November 2012): 347-64. Given this feature of xiao, it would likely prove helpful to develop a complementary view of xiao along the lines of Lai’s suggestion of Confucian ethics as “knowing-to,” i.e., knowing how to act in a particular moment. However, the epistemological emphasis of Lai’s thesis does not serve us well to understand the disposition of love that is part of the judgment and knowledge of acts, and thus I do not develop it here.

Given this shape of xiao, it only makes sense to approach it as a virtue, which St. Thomas defines as the perfection of a power resulting in act. But, what of the charge of Ames and Rosemont that “virtue” language is fundamentally individualistic and does not capture the relational necessity of the Confucian understanding of filial piety? In this Ames and Rosemont have misunderstood the nature of virtue as Aristotle and Thomas conceive them. Aristotle considers virtue within the context of the polis, friendships, and with the assumption that the search for truth is inherently communal (hence his consistent rehearsal of preceding opinions). St. Thomas, for his part, understands virtues such as fides and caritas to not simply bind the individual to God, but to the Church as well. We could add that for both, the virtue iustitia is completely meaningless without the relational structure of human life. It is true enough that Confucianism emphasizes different relationships, but both Aristotle and Aquinas recognize the inherent relationality of human life.

Thus, the language of virtue does not circumvent the fundamental insights of the Confucian tradition regarding the relationality of human life; indeed, it enhances them, especially from a theological perspective. Although an early Confucian would need to be introduced to the language of virtue I deploy, I am confident he or she could recognize and approve the portrayal I provide. Turning to the language of virtue clarifies the image for the non-Chinese thinker, and is best seen as “discussing things that the early Confucians would think of as good character traits that contribute to the flourishing of individuals and their society.”

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82 ST Ia Iae 55 q. 55 a. 1. resp.

Fundamentally, my contention in the following chapters is this: *xiao* is the disposition of filial love as it is necessarily enacted or performed in concrete acts of filial obedience, which thus partially constitute *xiao*. Obedience is intrinsic to *xiao* service, but not always in ways we might expect. In the two forms of *xiao* that the *Liji* teaches are the highest – mourning and sacrificing\(^8^4\) – it is strange to think of the son obeying his parent in any meaningful way. In the early Confucian texts I examine, *xiao* involves obedience not only to one’s parents, but also to *tiandaо* (the Way of Heaven) and *li*, the pattern of ritual and ritual propriety that touches upon all life.

Thus, my reading opposes long-standing misconstruals of the Confucian *xiao* depicting it as a tool for oppression or securing subservience. Rather, I contend early Confucians understood *xiao* as the virtue of love for one’s parents that is manifested, completed, and enacted in obedience, and moves the *xiao* son toward obeying *tian*, *li*, and of course, his own parents when possible. Yet, here we must include the proviso that without obeying *tiandaо* and *li* in particular, early Confucians think it impossible to rightly love one’s parents. Here again, we find that *xiao* has its virtuous essence neither in service nor in disposition alone, but in the harmonious attunement of both to one another.

\(^8^4\) *Liji, Ji Yi*, 25
CHAPTER 6

“WHILE LIVING, SERVE THEM WITH LI”: XIAO AS PARENTAL CARE

1. Introduction

My fundamental thesis in this and the subsequent chapter is that early Confucians understood xiao as the virtue of filial love enacted and perfected in forms of filial obedience. In the Analects, Confucius defines xiao as follows: “When alive, serve one’s parents with li (sheng shi zhi yi li 生事之以禮); when they have died bury them with li and sacrifice to them with li.”¹ Throughout the course of this chapter, we will explore the first definition of xiao as service or care to living parents.

Early Confucians describe three distinct ways of providing care for one’s parents, which I reference as “yangist” or direct care, “indirect parental care,” and “daoist” or moralist care.² Though awkward neologisms, these terms aptly fit the categories present in Confucian discourse. “Yangist” or “direct” care references parental service as yang (nouri shing care): providing food, shelter, and nursing in times of illness. “Indirect” care concerns actions that do not directly impact the parent, but affect the son’s ability to give care to the parent or may result in shame or sorrow to parents. “Daoist” or “moralist” care here signifies care that is aimed at helping parents become morally excellent by

¹ Analects, 2.5. Mencius 3A:2.2 attributes this same teaching to Confucius’ disciple Zengzi, who became an important figure in the development of xiao.

² There is some risk of confusion here because the terms Yangist and Daoist are often used to refer to variant schools of thought in ancient China. As I explain, I mean these terms in a Confucian sense, and do not mean to imply any connection with these other schools.
following the *dao*. This sort of care is founded upon the sense that the child has a responsibility to help his parents maintain the *dao* and moral excellence.

In my analysis of these forms, I will show how early Confucians understood such care as grounded in the disposition of filial love. Currently, scholarship on Confucian philosophy debates whether *xiao* was grounded in obligation, or something like natural emotions.\(^3\) Liu Qingping, for example, has argued the Confucian emphasis on the family is based in *emotionales* in opposition to the movement of *rationales* that grounds Socratic philosophy.\(^4\) My contention is that *xiao* is primarily grounded neither in the duty of reciprocating care for parents nor in proper emotional feelings (*qing* 清) for one’s parents. Rather, *xiao* flows out the disposition of sonship and concerns enacting this sonship. Filial love is for early Confucians an attitude and disposition of devotion and concern for one’s parents that involves proper feelings and duties, but is not reducible to these.

The best way to understand my use of filial love and obedience here is through recourse to the Confucian doctrine of rectifying names (*zheng ming* 正名). The *Analects* teaches that in order for there to be good government, “fathers must father, and sons must ‘son’ (*fufu zizi* 父父子子).”\(^5\) Thus sonship must be enacted, performed, and expressed in concrete forms because it is an intrinsically social and concrete relationship. What I

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\(^3\) See, e.g. Cecilia Wee, “Filial Obligations: A Comparative Study,” *Dao* 13 (2014): 83-97; Zhang Xianglong, “An Analysis of the Consciousness of Filial Piety Through the Perspective of Time,” in *Ritual and the Moral Life*, 105-18; Ivanhoe, “Filial Piety as a Virtue.” In particular, Wee’s essay illustrates that the discussion of *xiao* as duty is in part based on concerns from the analytic tradition. I approach *xiao* from a more Thomistic background, seeing love as including obligation at particular points, but not reducible to duty as such.


\(^5\) *Analects*, 12.11.
describe as filial love is the capacity of the xiao son to desire to enact his filial life that is marked by devotion and concern for his parents. Filial obedience allows the son to enact and perfect his filial love, and hence is how xiao is performed and actualized. Moreover, as we shall see, the scope of this enactment is not limited to the family context, but is quite universal. Xiao, then, is not merely one important virtue among others that must be transcended, but it constitutes a form of life as a way of performing one’s identity in the world.

2. Obedience and Love in Care for Parents: Yangist or Direct Parental Care

Direct parental care is my term for forms of parental service that have parents’ health, good fortune, and/or happiness as both proximate and remote end. In Confucian texts, this form of care is developed primarily as yang 養. Graphically, yang is composed of the figure for goat or sheep (yang 羊) on top and the radical for eat (shi 食) on bottom. Yang signifies giving meat for consumption (rather than sacrifice), and

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6 Roetz, Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age, 53-66 and 93-101. Roetz argues that the family life, involving xiao is pre-moral (conventional ethics) and is eventually transcended in Confucianism by turning to ren 仁, which he argues is postconventional and truly moral. To Roetz, “the family is of special importance as the place of first exercise of virtue, but it is not ruled out to gradually expand the range of the ethical commitment” (129). Particularly with indirect care, I show this conception of the family as merely concerning the interactions among the individuals of a household is restrictive of the true character of the Confucian understanding of xiao. Xiao cannot be “transcended” for early Confucians, but rather is an essential component and hermeneutic for authentic morality.

7 Kong De-cheng, “The Essence of Filial Piety,” in Filial Piety and Future Society, 127-39; Knapp, “Reverent Caring: the Parent-Son Relationship in Early Medieval Tales of Filial Offspring,” in Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History, 44-70. Kong argues that providing service to one’s parents in a yang way is the essence of xiao for Confucian history. Cf. to Knapp’s essay in which he argues that in medieval China (approx. 100-600 AD), the theme of yang was central to the popular imagination regarding filial piety, even though he says it was less important philosophically. In this section, I show this lack of concern is not the case for early Confucians. However, if Knapp is correct, this medieval change may explain why philosophical readings of xiao show little interest in yang forms of care.
regards feeding and nourishing another’s physical and even emotional health. Although in the Confucian tradition, *yang* can take various objects – for example, the *Mencius* famously teaches of “nourishing the flood-like *qi*” (2A: 2) – with regard to *xiao* it is basically aimed at the provision of food, comfort, and care in time of illness or old age. Taken more generally, *yang* refers to the service given to parents who require explicit and specific forms of direct care in order to survive and flourish.

In ancient China, it was self-evident that children ought to provide such care for their parents. The distinctive approach of early Confucianism was to emphasize the insufficiency of these forms of care as constituting *xiao* on their own. Conversely, early Confucianism also recognized the implicit necessity of providing *yang* care as part of *xiao*. In a foundational passage, Confucius teaches that, “these days *xiao* is considered to be the ability to care (*yang*) for one’s parents. But even dogs and horses are given care; without respect (*jing* 敬), wherein lies the difference?” Although Confucius here points out it is precisely how yangist care is provided that makes it a form of *xiao*, we can also see that one cannot be *xiao* without nourishing one’s parents.

We cannot overlook the necessity of physical care within *xiao*, for then we risk overly internalizing *xiao* as mere sentiment towards one’s parents. When Mencius teaches five ways of conduct that are considered non-*xiao*, three are so because they elect courses of action that prevent providing care to one’s parents. Mencius names laziness, 

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8 Roel Sterckx, “Sages, Cooks, and Flavourings in Warring States and Han China,” *Monumenta Serica* 54 (2006): 11-15. Sterckx notes that the consumption of meat was not merely for health, but was a sign of abundance and prosperity, and was used in confirming relationships or bonds. Hence yangist care concerns blessing of good health and prosperity to parents, as well as a ceremonial intensification of the parent-child bond.

9 In this passage, *yang* takes an immaterial object, the *hau-ran qi* 浩然氣, *qi* being the “vital energy” reminiscent of the Gk *pneuma*.

10 *Analects*, 2.7
pursuit of vices (gambling, wine, etc.), and desiring wealth and commodities, as unfilial precisely because the son who falls into these habits does not look after the nourishment of his parents (bu gu fu-mu zhi yang 不顧父母之養).\textsuperscript{11} Similarly the “Filial Practices” (xiao xing 孝行) chapter of the Lü Shi Chun Qiu elaborates five ways in which the son ought to yang his parents: caring for their bodies with comfortable lodging, their eyes with pleasant things to see, their ears with pleasant things to hear, their mouths with delicious foods, and their wills with respectful congress.\textsuperscript{12} Hence the bodily care of yang cannot be overlooked as fundamental to being xiao.

Although yangist care is an ineluctable feature of xiao, the Confucian tradition refuses to stop at the physical aspect of service. In the Liji, Zengzi refers to yang as the lowest form of xiao.\textsuperscript{13} His sentiment is found throughout the early Confucian tradition, largely for two main reasons. First, like Mencius, some authors argue that while yang care is essential, “giving yang to the living is not sufficient to be considered a great service; only seeing off the dead properly can be such service.”\textsuperscript{14} Yang is thus eclipsed by “higher” forms of xiao that deal with care for parents after death.\textsuperscript{15} Another reason, like that given in the Lü Shi Chun Qiu, focuses more on yang as developed in Analects 2.7: “providing yang care can be easily accomplished; having respect (jing) is difficult.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{11} Mencius 4B: 58.
\textsuperscript{12} Lü Shi Chun Qiu, 69, 7.
\textsuperscript{13} Liji, Ji Yi, 25.
\textsuperscript{14} Mencius 4B: 41.
\textsuperscript{15} See chapter 4 of this dissertation.
\textsuperscript{16} Lü Shi Chun Qiu, 69, 9.
This circles back to the key Confucian emphasis on nourishing care for parents: 
xiao does not lie simply in providing care for one’s parents, but the manner in which care
is provided. The best way to understand the proper manner of xiao service is captured
under the general principle of filial love. One primary aspect of this filial love is the jing
or reverence required in filial yang. As the Liji puts it, “all small men (xiao ren 小人)\textsuperscript{17}
are able to support their parents; if the gentleman doesn’t have respect, how can they be
distinguished?”\textsuperscript{18} It is possible to consider a case where a son would provide his parents
care, but to do so in a way that it is not xiao. The question is what does this disposition of
jing impute to the care in order to make it xiao?

Typically, jing functions as part of the order of ritual propriety (li), and conveys a
sense of gravity, honor, and respect. Sin Yee Chan has argued that for early Confucian
texts, jing signifies both a) a serious frame of mind, and b) an intentional state of
respect.\textsuperscript{19} By this, Chan means that the concept of jing is a general attitude of seriousness
due to a strong recognition of responsibility. When this attitude of seriousness is aimed at
a specific object – such as one’s parents – there is a concomitant recognition of the value
of this object, and so seriousness expands into reverence or respect.\textsuperscript{20} Although jing
involves explicit aspects of comportment – standing the right way or carrying the proper
mien (se 俢) – jing is not merely the appearance of respect or doing respectful things.
Jing is rather the disposition of respect and seriousness that permeates acts. In terms of

\textsuperscript{17} The xiaoren or “the small man” refers to a moral standing that is the opposite of the morally
excellent junzi 君子, or gentleman.

\textsuperscript{18} Liji Fang Ji, 21.

\textsuperscript{19} Sin Yee Chan, “The Confucian Notion of Jing 敬 (Respect)” PEW 56 no. 2 (April 2006): 229-52.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 231-33.
xiao, the concern for jing emphasizes that the son must recognize the value of his parents and conduct himself accordingly and respect them.

Within xiao, we might ask whence does a son understand the value of his parents? Confucians tend to suggest that jing for parents is connected to love for one’s parents; the Lü Shi Chun Qiu, for example, states that “Love (ai 愛) and respect are exhausted (jin 竭) in service to one’s parents.” Filial love thus is the “value rubric” that gives rise to jing in xiao. Filial love defines the value of the parents that in turn animates the “seriousness” of jing.

But here, we reach a point difficult to appreciate. A. T. Nuyen’s important essay “Love and Respect in the Confucian Family” lays out the complication nicely. Through an appeal to ren 仁 as love and li 禮 as respect, Nuyen argues that within the family these forces have a balancing effect: love is a force bringing us together, while respect distances us from one another. Within the family, Nuyen argues it would dangerous for love to “become dominant.” He warns, “drawn too close to each other, family members become too ‘familiar’ which each other.” Hence, one may argue that love and respect moderate one another, but are not coextensive. However, Nuyen overly identifies familiarity with love. Excessive familiarity with a parent is not simply “too much love” that must be counter-balanced through distancing respect. Rather, it is loving one’s parent in the wrong way, without having the proper order of love and life inform filial affection.

For early Confucians, having reverence was necessary not to balance love, but to perfect its enactment. Early Confucians understood filial love as love for particular

21 Lü Shi Chun Qiu, Xiao Xing Lan, Xiao Xing 2.

parents (i.e. only two unique individuals) who were elders (zhang 長) as well as parents. The seriousness of filial love stems from this particularity and the finitude involved therein. Confucius teaches, “a child ought not be ignorant of his parents’ ages – it is at once joyful and dreadful.” Zhu Xi explains this passage as “the xiao son’s heart is overjoyed by his parents old age, but dreads their decline.” Similarly the Yangzi Fayan states “a xiao son cherishes (ai 爱) every day with his parents.”

In these passages, the love of one’s parents necessarily confronts the facts of concrete human existence. The son takes joy in the fact that his parents have lived much longer than him – they are elders to be reverenced, and have passed on their wisdom to him. However, his aged parents will also die, sooner rather than later, and he will be deprived of their active presence in his life. In this light, the jing aspect of filial service is absolutely essential, for what would it be for a son to frivolously provide his parents care in time of illness, or address them with flippant speech? Such actions would suggest the son has neither realized the status of his parents nor that he may soon lose them. If he cherishes them, he cannot do without paying them reverence and respect.

The seriousness of filial love and the need to communicate love as respect involves the turn to ritual propriety (li), requiring the attitude of filial obedience to the ritual aspects of the service. A son ought both cherish his parents and ritually enact this

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23 Mugitani Kunio, “Filial Piety and ‘Authentic Parents’ in Religious Daoism,” in *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, 110-21. Kunio’s article shows that the particularity of parents was not a presumption of all Chinese thought. In religious Daoism, Kunio argues, it was understood that because all parents are born from qi, qi itself and divine spirits are the “authentic parents” and one’s biological parents are “but the field in which the divine creativity takes place” (119). Confucians, on the other hand, saw the parent’s mediation of life was unique, essential, and perhaps syncretic with the life-giving forces of tian.

24 *Analects*, 4.21.


26 *Yangzi Fayan*, 13, 3.
love in service for his parents. The external aspects of service are fundamentally connected to and expressive of the son’s internal dispositions. The Xiaojing (“The Classic of Filial Piety”) teaches, “This is how xiao children serve their parents: at home they show their parents reverence (jing); in nourishing their parents, the children show their enjoyment; when a parent is sick, the child shows his grief.”

The term for show or exhibit used in this passage (zhì 致) has less a sense of displaying an emotional state, and more extending this state. With the use of zhì, the implication is that the providing yang for one’s parents becomes the outward extension or component of love and respect. Conversely, within xiao, reverence is itself imbued with the aspects of enjoying service, of deep sincere concern for one’s parents.

The acts associated with yang service are xiao precisely because they proceed from the disposition of filial love. By “proceed” I mean something akin to what Slingerland says about the general Chinese concept of wu-wei 無為: the action of xiao is “effortless,” flowing immediately from the disposition of love as its natural embodiment in the world. Thus without filial love – manifested here as the serious respect for one’s parents – there are no xiao acts. Yet we also recognize how caring for one’s parents entails obedience, so that we cannot have xiao without filial acts. Xiao is not one or the other: it is the convergence and mutuality of love and obedience.

To develop this point more precisely in terms of obedience, we can note that all parents have particular desires such as favorite foods or seasonings that make them happy.

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27 Xiaojing, 10.

28 Edward G. Slingerland, Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as a Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China (New York: Oxford, 2003), 29. Slingerland defines wu-wei as “literally meaning ‘no doing/effort/exertion,’ it refers metaphorically to a state in which action is occurring even though the Subject is no longer exerting force.”
or a meal enjoyable, and they can make requests upon a caregiver for specific forms of care or communicate particular needs at certain times. Because such requests or preferences are concrete desires, attending to them requires obedience. Yet this obedience would not be simply about power relations, but a desire out of filial love to make one’s parents happy. Conversely, the disobedience would not show independence, but rather a lack of love.

We should not imagine this means that direct obedience to parents alone suffices for xiao. The son must also be obedient to the structure of li, provide care in the proper way and with the proper attitude or mien.29 Certainly one can imagine a sick parent giving commands or making requests here and there, with the child fulfilling the request while mumbling under his breath about a desire to do other things. I vividly recall growing severely agitated at my mother when as a teenager I was made to take out the garbage, even though I did indeed fulfill the assigned task. Although I technically obeyed my mother, can obeying a parent’s command while complaining loudly and doing the work slowly or without regard for quality be called “filial” obedience?

In most cases, a son can technically obey and do what is requested, but he might not be xiao. Filial love requires more than simple submission. As a passage from the Liji has it, “A xiao son gives yang to his elders in this way: he delights their hearts, and does not disobey their will, he delights their ears and eyes, arranges their bed chambers and

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29 Yuli Liu, “The Self and Li in Confucianism,” JCP 31 no 3 (September 2004): 363-76; Lai, “Li in the Analects: Training in Moral Competence and the Question of Flexibility,” PEW 56 no 1 (January 2006): 69-83. Liu argues that in Confucianism, the person is both a li-follower and a li-maker; hence, li has an essential element of creativity to it. However, Lai shows how the creativity of li is tied to the obediential aspect. She says li comprises three stages of moral development: 1) a naïve stage in which one learns and inculcates correct forms of behavior, 2) an experimental stage where principles are extracted from continual practice, and 3) the stage of the cultivated person, wherein li can be used as a channel of self-expression. Through Lai’s essay, we can see that the li of xiao can genuinely express the self, but only because the xiao son has taken the steps to learn and understand the basic ritual forms. In xiao, the creativity of li is located within obedience.
home for comfort, and to serve them food and drink with devotion (zhong 忠).” Here it
is not so much the fact of his obedience as the manner of his obedience that makes the
son xiao. The son does not simply love his parent and thus he obeys her, but his
obedience enacts and is the practice of his filial devotion because it is done in certain
ways (communicated to him through li).

Acts of filial obedience thus become the way that the son can actually live (and
not just “communicate”) his filial love. As we saw above, it is impossible to
communicate jing and thus filial love apart from concrete actions. A son must, then, be
cognizant and obedient to the order of ritual propriety (li) that governs the encounter
between parent and child. A helpful illustration of this (though not in regard to xiao) is
from Analects 14.4. Yuan Rang was squatting on his heels while waiting for Confucius,
and in doing so took up an overly relaxed position, and failed to communicate the respect
due to an elder. So, Confucius reprimands Yuan and raps him on the shin with his cane.
We do not know about Yuan Rang’s inner disposition – but we certainly can tell that he
did not obey the set rules of propriety that function as a basic grammar of respect.

30 Liji, Nei Ze, 48.

31 James Legge renders Liji, Tan Gong I, 2 as follows: “In serving his father (a son) should...in
every possible way wait on and nourish him, without being tied to definite rules (wu fang 無方).” This
seems to explicitly go against the point made above, but it is not as clear as it seems. While fang 方 can
mean something like rule or standard, it does not seem very likely here. At the very least, this is because we
have no context for what sort of rule or standard is implied – does the son not care about rules or propriety
that govern his other social relations so that he may care for his father, or does he disregard ritual rules
governing the father-son relationship, so that he may care for his father no matter what? A different, and
more plausible reading, is to take fang 方 in the sense of its homophone fang 放. This would render the
passage something like “the son should serve his father in every possible way wait on him and nourish him
without being disobedient (or neglectful, a hindrance, etc.).”
In giving yang, ritual forms constitute a “grammar” of filial love, and the enactment of filial love requires this grammar for actualization. Imagine my father is sick and needs a broth to ease his discomfort and make him well. What if instead of putting the broth in a proper bowl with the proper flatware, I bring him a tall glass filled with soup and a straw? Even if I feel deeply devoted to my father, my failure serve him with the proper form prohibits the performance my devotion, and in fact calls it into question. How devoted can I be if I am satisfied with serving him in this way? Now, it is another matter entirely if he cannot consume the soup differently, or if all I possess are cups and straws. However, if I can serve my father properly but fail to do so, this filial disobedience impairs the filial love that inspires service in the first place.

We would be remiss to not mention another aspect of the actualization of filial love in obedience, which is perhaps one of the more difficult to appreciate. Especially during the Han, as emphasis became placed on negotiating the Three Bonds and human relationships in general, there began the tradition of tales of filial offspring. These types of tales often show an extraordinary devotion to parents in the face of loss in other relations. For example, there is the tale of a man who was faced with the possibility of providing either for his parents or his wife and child. In order to fulfill his xiao, the man elects to bury his wife and child alive.

Stories like this are difficult to process, and strike many as barbaric or extremely misguided. But these stories, are meant not as absolute statements about the value of life,

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32 We must keep in mind that grammar or language is not a posteriori to what is internal. For human beings, language is part of the conversio ad phantasma; we think within language, not without. Likewise, I emphasize that xiao is love that is love within obedience, and concomitant with it. In a sense, we might explain this as xiao consists of the mutual exchange of filial love and obedience, where filial love has priority in substance, but not in duration.

33 Knapp, Selfless Offspring, 74.
but rather concern the negotiation of relationships under tensions of fulfillment.

Consequently, these tales explore the Confucian principle of the human *dao* (*rendao*). In these cases, providing for parents is understood to be more intrinsic to practicing the *rendao* than caring for other relations. The upshot then is that, in addition to obedience to parents’ commands and the order of *li*, yangist care also implies concern to obey the *rendao*.

Returning to our main point, yangist care shows the Confucian xiao concerns the enactment of filial love through acts of filial obedience. We have allowed for the intellectual distinction between filial love and obedience to show the priority lies on the dispositional element. However, *in res*, filial love and obedience are mutually informing and coextensive, since filial love cannot be properly actualized apart from obedience. As we proceed through the other various forms of xiao service, this theme will be rehearsed anew, on an increasingly greater scale.

3. *Indirect Parental Care*

While direct parental care deals with parents as the direct object of filial service, indirect care concerns service to parents through other forms of conduct, with parents indirectly affected. The scope of indirect care is vast in the Confucian tradition, and so the discussion here can only provide a general sketch in order to illustrate the relationship between filial love and obedience. Indirect parental care consists of several kinds of acts taking the parent’s health, happiness, or reputation as indirect, remote end. In general, indirect parental care is conceived in the language of treatment of one’s self and body, and the cultivation of reputation. Both are present in the opening passage of the *Xiaojing*, which states that xiao begins in not injuring the body, and terminates in practicing the
As indirect care, *xiao* speaks to the effects of a child’s actions upon the parent, primarily either in emotional state or familial reputation.

The *Analects* does not present a systematic approach to indirect parental care, but contains several illuminating passages. *Analects 2.6* defines *xiao* as having a parent’s only worry being that their child is sick, meaning the child ought not cause parents to worry if she can help it. *Analects 4.19* teaches, “when your father and mother are alive, do not journey far, and when you do travel, be sure to have a specific destination.”

Whereas the first passage is rather straightforward, the second exhorts particular travel habits, which are not obviously connected to filial piety. Exploring this passage more, then, helps shed light on the category of indirect care.

The *Fa Ming* commentary to the *Analects* stresses the problem of indeterminate travel is due to a loss of capacity for *yang*: “the more a person takes a day’s journey, the less he will exhaust one day’s worth of caring for his parents.”

Elsewhere, the *Ji Zhu* comments that a son should want his parents to know his destination, so that he will not cause them worry about his safety. Zhu Xi takes yet another course and interprets the distance of travel (*yuan* 迹) in terms of affection: a son should not lose his love for his

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34 *Xiaojing*, 1.

35 *Analects* 2.6. The passage reads 孟武伯問孝。子曰「父母唯其疾之憂。」The word *wei* 唯 can be causative, and thus mean “Parents, because [their son] is sick, worry.” But *wei* can also mean “only or exclusively.” While grammatically, taking *wei* as causative is stronger, it also is odd as an explanation of *xiao* unless it implies the son has a say in whether his parents are worrying or not. The implication of using *wei* suggests that sickness – particularly a kind not brought on by a child’s lack of awareness or bad habits - is the only reason why parents should have to worry about their children.

36 *Analects*, 4.19,

37 *Lunyu Jishi*, 274.

38 *Lunyu Jishi*, 273.
parents, and should not forget them in a single step he takes.\(^{39}\) The implication is that aimlessly travelling far and wide suggests that the son does not love his parents, or at least communicates to his parents lack of affection, therefore causing them sorrow.

Referencing *yang* provides a somewhat functional interpretation, similar to *Mencius* 4A:19. Mencius poses the question of which type of service is greatest (his answer: to serve one’s parents) and then which type of duty (*shou* 守) is greatest.\(^{40}\) He replies that protecting one’s body (*shou shen* 守身) is the greatest duty, and provides the following rationale: “I have heard of those who have not neglected their bodies (*bu shi qi shen* 失其身) and are able to serve their parents. I have not heard of those who have neglected their bodies (*shi qi shen* 失其身) and are able to serve their parents.”\(^{41}\)

Regarding travel, the son must not only be directly concerned about where he must go and what tasks he hopes to accomplish. He must also consider the effect on his parents, for if he travels on dangerous paths or insouciantly, he will make himself unavailable to serve his parents properly.

The latter two interpretations depend upon a fundamental concept for *xiao* in Confucianism, that the parent has natural love for the child. There are always exceptions, and not all parents do truly love their children, or at least do not love them well. Most famously, the parents of the ancient sage-king Shun hated him, and tried to kill him on several occasions.\(^{42}\) Yet in most cases a *xiao* son rightly assumes that his parents love

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\(^{39}\) Zhuzi Yulei, Li-ren 2, Fumuzai Zhang 1.

\(^{40}\) *Shou* is usually a verbal idea, and means to protect or defend something. The duty here is one of guarding or protecting something.

\(^{41}\) *Mencius* 4A:19.

him, that aimless wandering can cause them sorrow, and is thus unfilial. Even though the
direct object of the son’s decision is travelling itself, he undertakes this decision with an
understanding on how it will affect his parents, and this indirect impact is determinative
for one who is *xiao*.

With this, we reach perhaps the most foundational idea in the Confucian
articulation of indirect care: the son ought to protect his body for the sake of his parents.
What Western thinkers typically assign to self-preservation or self-care, Confucianism
considers filial service. On the one hand, this is because parents love their children; if a
child is concerned enough to provide a favorite meal, how much more so will he strive to
protect what his parents cherish most, himself. Yet there are also other reasons given in
the tradition. For instance, in the *Qu Li I* chapter, the *Liji* teaches that “a *xiao* son will not
engage in furtive deeds, nor climb dangerous heights, for he is afraid of bringing
humiliation (*ru* 耻) upon his parents. While his parents are living, he will not swear to die
with a friend, nor will he have private wealth he keeps from his parents.”

The fact that a son’s conduct can humiliate rather than glorify (*rong* 荣) his parents leads him to care for
his body, determines the form his friendships will take, and governs his attitude toward
possessions.

Appreciating this logic requires investigating *xiao* as it develops toward the Han
dynasty. As Confucian thinkers increasingly turned toward correlational and
cosmological modes of thought, this had a profound impact on articulations of *xiao*. In
this era, Confucian texts employ several variations of the following principle, here as
stated in the *Ji Yi* book of the *Liji*: “our bodies are that substance which our parents have

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43 *Liji, Qu Li I*, 19.
left behind (shen ye zhe fu-mu zhi yi ye 身也者，父母之遺體也) – in conducting oneself toward that substance which our parents have left behind, dare one be irreverent (bu jing 不敬)? This passage emphasizes that the individual body of the son, as opposed to life in general, is valuable precisely because it is from one’s parents. It is for this reason that conduct toward the body be filled with reverence, which we have previously seen includes ensuring ability to serve parents with yang, preserve the body from harm, and honor one’s parents with one’s actions.

Significantly, this notion was codified through its central position in the Xiaojing. Confucius opens by asking Zengzi whether he knows how the ancient kings were able to accomplish perfect peace and harmony between the distinctions of social and political classes. The answer that Confucius provides is through xiao. In his elucidation, Confucius begins by explaining, “the body, hair and skin, are received from the parents, and we dare not harm or injure it – this is the beginning of xiao.” From this, Confucius shows that this natural foundation permeates the full course of life and conduct:

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44 Li Ji, Ji Yi, 26.

45 The word shen 身 is often translated as “self” but really means the particular, bodily person. The focus on shen rather than, say sheng 生 (“life”) is significant. In xiao, the exhortation to care for oneself for the sake of one’s parents focuses on the particularity of the son, whose physical features testify to the fact that he comes from his parents. As we see below, the focus on shen is not to say that parents to not transmit life, nor that life itself has value. The focus, rather, is on what best illustrates the gift of life from the parent to the child, which lies in the physical form.

46 Ivanhoe, “Filial piety as a virtue,” 191. Ivanhoe dismisses this form of discourse as the foundation for considering xiao as a virtue because he does not think “it is at all evident” that existence in itself is good. Not only do I disagree with Ivanhoe on this score, it seems fairly clear that at least a strain of early Confucians thought existence was intrinsically good, as a gift from one’s parents (at least mediated through them).

47 Wang Z. Gao, Confucian Filiality (New York: CN Times Books, 2013. Gao takes the Xiaojing as the fundamental expression of Confucian understanding of xiao. It is true that the text becomes a classic (jing 儒) and was central to later Confucians, but we cannot assume it plays this role in early Confucianism. In fact, I mean to suggest here that it seems the Xiaojing is part of a dynamic development of discourse regarding xiao among early Confucians.
“Establishing one’s self in practicing the dao, and having one’s name spread to later generations in order to glorify (xian 显) one’s parents – this is the terminus of xiao.

Indeed, xiao begins in service to one’s parents, continues in service to one’s lord, and ends in the establishment of one’s self.”

We should note at this point an important implication of the teaching that our bodies come from our parents. For both the passage from the Ji Yi exhorting sons not to die with a friend, and for the Xiaojing, the parental bond does not only affect whether one acts with caution or impetuosity. It also pervades other concrete relationships, e.g., friendship and political service. Taken this way, the Confucian approach to indirect care involves interpreting other important and essential relationships through a xiao hermeneutic. Xiao is thus the sort of filial love that, in a move strikingly evocative of St. Augustine’s ordo amoris, orders the way other relationships are pursued. The xiao son’s manner of managing friendships and his way of serving his ruler both are directed toward the impact on his parents.

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48 Xiaojing, 1; Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence, 105. The term rendered here as “glorify” follows James Legge’s interpretation of xian 显 (See Legge, ). Ames and Rosemont have it as “bring esteem to one’s parents,” which I think mutes an important aspect of the term. Xian means to make something manifest or evident, and thus the sense of the passage is that the son’s establishment of a name “re-presents” his parents to the world, or perhaps reveals them.

49 Augustine, Confessions, Book II; Liu, “Is Mencius’ Doctrine of ‘Extending Affection’ Tenable?” AP 14 no 1 (March 2004): 79-90. Liu criticizes Mencius, who teaches that familial love must be “extended” (da 达) throughout the world. His critique is that the particular feelings for family cannot be “extended” to wider social obligations (i.e., xiao cannot become ren) precisely because we must continue to love our parents in a special way; hence, we cannot “extend” this love to those who are not our parents. The logical argument he makes is sound and compelling, but he is wrong to conclude that Confucianism has no way to resolve the paradox in question. Invoking Augustine’s ordo amoris draws attention to the fact that early Confucians do not justify the goodness of things because of xiao (i.e., other people are not loved because they are similar creatures to those we love in our family), but rather xiao informs the child how to negotiate the proper attitude toward and use of good around him or her (i.e., it tells us how to love others properly, in an ordered fashion). Mencius may be wrong about how this is effected – though I am not sure da is as narrowly construed as Liu portrays – but this does not render untenable the entire Confucian conception of xiao and its relation to other goods of human life.
In Han texts, this range of xiao becomes vastly important. In “The Root of Xiao” chapter of the Da Dai Liji, much is made of the idea that the son must love his body (ai qi shen 爱其身) “so that he will not forget his parents.” The chapter begins with Zengzi’s claim that zhong 忠 is the root of xiao. Typically, the word zhong is used politically, to describe the relationship between ruler and minister, i.e. loyalty. Here, it seems to mean something quite different. The passage goes on to explain the zhong-root as “the xiao son does not climb to great heights, he does not walk on dangerous paths, and does not rely on a rheumatic for support. He does not laugh carelessly, he does not criticize others thoughtlessly; he conceals what is not commanded and draws near what is suggested.”

In this context, Zengzi’s claim that zhong is the root of xiao only makes sense if loyalty is here conceived as directed toward the body as the parent’s remainder. Because the body is this, the Da Dai Liji can justify the massive range it ascribes to xiao.

According to this same chapter, xiao also legislates the kind of speech a person will use, how he will employ others, and suggests that all his service, whether to parents or not, is at root the expression of affection for his parents (xiaozi zhi shi qin ye 孝子之事親也).

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50 Da Dai Liji, Zengzi Ben Xiao, 3.
51 Ibid., 1.
52 Ibid., 1.
53 See Ibid., 2-4. The phrase “孝子之事親也” as I have it above requires explanation. For the purpose of translation, the most helpful reading would be, “the xiao son’s serve to his parents is this” as the remainder of paragraph 3 explains forms of actions through which he does not forget (wang 忘) his affection for his parents. However the phrase could also mean “the xiao son’s service is qin (i.e., the expression of parental affection).” Though formally and functionally the former reading is much better, the second brings out an important wrinkle in the passage. For in describing what service to one’s parents is, the Da Dai Liji sees it as being tied loosely to places “so as to await instruction,” as well as the son’s avoiding violent men, and sending messages when possible to keep his parents from worry. In this sense, we are not talking about merely what kinds of service one does for one’s parents, but how love for one’s
This intuition is expanded in the “The Great Xiao according to Zengzi” chapter of the same text, built on Zengzi’s insight that the person with great xiao “honors his parents, does not humiliate his subordinates, and is able to nourish those under his leadership.”

Here, invoking again the idea that the body is received from one’s parents, Zengzi teaches five acts that negate xiao (fei xiao 非孝):

- To live apart from the village [i.e., away from society, as a hermit] - this is not xiao. To serve one’s lord without loyalty – this is not xiao. To manage one’s ministers without respect – this is not xiao. To deal with one’s friends without trustworthiness – this is not xiao. To fight in a battle and prove one has no courage – this is not xiao. If these five acts are not followed, calamity will be visited upon the body, and dare one not reverence the body?

Without giving further exposition of each claim, we can already see that the Da Dai Liji assigns to a wide range of actions as being indirectly aimed at one’s parents, and thus under the rubric of xiao. More importantly, key to this conception is the natural relationship of the parent-child bond, grounded in the transmission of life and corporeal form. As the parent gives the child the body, all actions that concern the body (i.e., all human acts, since we do not act apart from our bodily existence) are referred to one’s parents. This doesn’t mean that xiao requires a privileging of physical existence over-against the immaterial aspects of human life. It is simply an illustration that the natural foundation of the parent-child bond provides logic for why one ought to be xiao, and moreover, what claims this natural foundation makes upon the child.

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54 Da Dai Liji, Zengzi Da Xiao, 1.
55 Ibid., 2.
Two texts of the Han period profoundly develop the natural foundation of \textit{xiao}, justifying its expansive moral range. The \textit{Yangzi Fayan} grounds the importance of \textit{xiao} in cosmological simile: “Parents – they surely a child’s Heaven and earth (\textit{tian di 天地})! Without Heaven, how is there life? Without earth, how is there body (\textit{xing 形})”\textsuperscript{56} Contained here is the idea that the father and mother’s begetting of children rehearses the cosmic processes of life. The father’s procreative agency is compared to \textit{Tian} which gives life (\textit{sheng 生}) and the mother’s compared to \textit{Di}, which is formed to make concrete things. For the author of the \textit{Fayan}, the importance of this point lies precisely in the fact that \textit{xiao} service cannot be seen as “generosity” (\textit{yu 裕}), for the son exists only through the generosity of his parents, just as the myriad creatures exist through the generosity of \textit{Tian} and \textit{Di}.

According to the \textit{Fayan}, the rationale for \textit{xiao} service lies in the process of the cosmos itself. There is a fundamental correspondence between the parent-child relation – how we are given particular existence – and the existence of all things. Similarly, the \textit{Chun-Qiu Fan Lu} develops \textit{xiao} in a cosmological direction intensifying this point. This text grounds \textit{xiao} in the movement of the five phases (\textit{wu xing 五行}), which is to say the motion of the cosmos. According to the \textit{Chun Qiu Fan Lu}’s cosmology, the five phases are tied to a specific season of harvest or cultivation, and the form of life in the season is reflected from its source – e.g., the autumn season leads us to harvest. Based on this, Dong Zhongshu\textsuperscript{57} says that the father gives life to the son and thus the son’s conduct is

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Yangzi Fayan}, 13, 2.

\textsuperscript{57} I refer to Dong Zhongshu out of convenience, not as a historical argument against Sarah A. Queen’s thesis that Dong Zhongshu is not the author of the \textit{Wuxing Dui} chapter. See Queen, \textit{From
shaped toward his father, just as the work done in particular seasons is geared toward harmonizing with the birth-element. This is why all the son’s actions correspond to his father, and giving glory to his father: just as the earth serves and passes all its glory to Tian, so the son serves his father in everything, and seeks only to further the father’s reputation.58

Both the Fayan and Chun Qiu Fan Lu develop a metaphysical logic striking again similar to St. Augustine’s ordo amoris. According to St. Augustine, God ought to be loved most of all because he the source of all, and created things ought to thus be loved relative to the Creator. Likewise, in these Han Confucian readings since the parent-child relation is the source of life it is justly the norming norm of the moral life as a whole. From the Confucian view, all actions I might undertake and all relations I might establish must be referenced to the root of my body and social existence: my parents.

While we have successfully laid out a basic sketch of how indirect care functions in the Confucian xiao, we have not yet addressed what this structure means for the relationship of filial love and obedience in the Confucian tradition. With indirect parental care, the function of obedience is most apparent. All moral acts and friendships are interpreted via the parent-child bond, and in this sense, all of a son’s actions can enact obedience to his parent’s wishes, affections, and honor. Although indirect parental care obviously is lacking direct parental commands or requests, the son is required to be obedient to the particular forms of life that do bring honor to his family and guard what his parents cherish most, himself.

58 Chun Qiu Fan Lu, 38, 1.
As for filial love, indirect care is simply unintelligible without it. What good would it be to remind a son of the love his parents have for him if he was not expected to love them? Similarly, why would it matter to a son that his parents are honored if he is not expected to cherish and have affection for them? Even if parents do not love or act as if they do not love their child, as in the case of Shun, the son is still expected to love them. In Shun’s case, for example, he weeps bitterly and mourns the enmity his parents have for him. Mencius explains this as, “a person of great xiao until the end of his life desires [the love of] his parents.”

The key to indirect parental care is that the assumed love of the son for his parents is given a concrete guide of enactment. This love should pervade one’s actions, all of them, because it is a love bound up with the gift of particular existence. Everything I have that allows me social congress in the world comes from my parents – my speech, my body, my conception of relationships and moreover my sociability itself. When exercising these gifts, were I to neglect my parents or ignore them, I would be falling short of filial love. For the son who loves his parents recognizes them as his parents, or in the words of the Fayan, as his “Heaven and Earth.” To fail to see one’s parents in this way and allow love for them to direct one’s actions means that the parents are loved as something less than parents – perhaps as very good friends or mentors, but not as the source for one’s life.

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59 Given that Shun is not loved by his parents, his own love seems to be neither a reciprocal duty nor simply a special feeling. Particularly in Mencius’ presentation of Shun in Mencius 4A:1-7, it is clear that Shun uses his rational faculty (in Thomistic terms) to discern the situation with his parents is indeed lamentable. This does not mean that Shun does not genuinely feel sad about the loss of relationship with his parents, but only to argue part of the reason he feels this way is because he understands this situation is the opposite of what is proper among human relations. Thus, contra Liu (“Emotionales Versus Rationales), Shun’s story shows that xiao as filial love is not blind love or pure emotion – it is a perfection of the rational human being.

60 Mencius 4A:1.
Indirect parental care allows for the observation that xiao is not only the circumincession of filial love and obedience, it also calls upon the whole person of the son. Xiao is not showing up on Thanksgiving, or for reunion dinner on Chinese New Year. Nor is it merely caring for parents when they are too old or sick to care for themselves. True xiao means conducting one’s life as if every decision truly impacts or concerns one’s parents, because each decision does. Xiao is not a set of obligations or feelings, but is a disposition of life and existence (habitus) in which the affections of filial love perpetually and in increasingly myriad ways are enacted in concrete forms of filial obedience.

4. Daoist, or Moral Parental Care

We have seen thus far that xiao children must provide care for their parents physically, emotionally, and in terms of reputation. A third form of care is moral care for parents. Early Confucianism held that a principle feature of xiao service is helping one’s parents keep the dao, i.e., helping them cultivate moral excellence. In terms of filial love and obedience, this class of care is unique because the love and obedience to one’s parents is subordinated to a higher devotion and obedience to the dao. Typically, the Confucian tradition explains this as the son being concerned for what is yi 義 (“appropriate” or “right” in a given situation), meaning he must be obedient to his parents in general, but also the moral dao, which includes obedience to his parents.

Significantly, it only becomes necessary to develop an account of moral care when one’s parents risk acting against the dao. Hence, there is an inherent tension in this form of care between the love and obedience of the dao with love and obedience towards one’s parents – which form of love and obedience will guide the other in time of conflict?
Key to the tension is its resolution cannot mean abandoning love and obedience towards one’s parents and simply following the dao, since filial love and obedience is part of the dao. For this reason, the Confucian approach to moral care fundamentally concerns how to negotiate the tension without destroying the parent-child bond. My argument is that daoist care shows most clearly that there are times that filial love and obedience requires greater obedience toward the dao, precisely so that it can remain xiao obedience and love.

I approach this form of parental care in three ways. First is through the story of the sage-king Shun as presented in the Mencius. As mentioned above, Shun is known as a filial exemplar because he remains xiao though his parents do not love him well. This situation created several notable tensions that Shun had to negotiate in which he seemed formally disobedient, but Mencius argues he never lost his xiao. Second is through the concept of remonstration (jian 諫), exhorting children to correct their parents. Remonstration in particular shows that xiao is not simply a tool for inculcating weak subordinates, but has to do with the pursuit of moral perfection within the family. Third is the crisis of the immoral father. Given the exhortation in the Analects that a son must not depart from his father’s dao for three years, this creates wide-ranging tensions with fathers who are morally corrupt.

4.1. Shun and the Disobedient Xiao

Shun was the second of the three sage-kings of antiquity that immediately preceded the founding of the Xia dynasty, succeeding king Yao and preceding king Yu. Along with Yao and Yu, Shun was a celebrated figure in early Confucianism, as an exemplar as ruler and as a virtuous person (since the two were aligned in the Confucian

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61 The two most comprehensive accounts of Shun’s life are found in the Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji) and the Mencius, esp. in Book 5A.
imagination). According to Sima Qian, Shun’s given name was “doubly illustrious” (chong hua 重華) and he was the son of Gu Sou 瞽叟, whose name literally means “the blind or stupid old man.” Gu Sou’s name is likely posthumous, as it summarizes his inability to care for his son who was renowned by everyone else for his virtue.

According to tradition, Shun was especially renowned for his xiao due to the circumstances in which he was forced to practice it. It is an understatement that Shun faced difficulty in negotiating the demands of xiao towards his parents. In one of the starkest episodes of Shun’s pitiable story, his father called him to work to on the roof a building, while setting fire to it from below. In this situation, Shun faced a conflict within xiao, and not merely because he must be xiao to one who tried to kill him. As we saw above, the body is that which has been received from one’s parents, and so to allow the body to be harmed needlessly is unfilial. At the same time, it is unfilial to disobey a parent’s wishes, and clearly Shun’s father wished that Shun be killed. We know that Shun escaped and thus chose to protect his own life – but was this a preservation or destruction of his xiao?

According to the logic of the Kongzi Jiayu, Shun shows his xiao in protecting himself. This is not only because he preserves what his parents have left behind, but also because Shun prevents his father from committing “unfatherly crimes” (bu fu zui 不父罪). In this case, Shun’s obedience to a lower good – his father’s immediate wishes – is

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62 Lauren F. Pfister, “Sublating Reverence to Parents: A Kierkegaardian Interpretation of the Sage-King Shun’s Piety,” JCP 40 no 1 (March 2013): 50-66. In general, I find Pfister is right to say that Shun primarily serves Tian and understands his filial responsibilities in this light. My presentation of Shun as a form of daoist care presumes Pfister is correct and furthers this observation.


64 Kongzi Jiayu, Liu Ben, 10.
sacrificed in favor of obeying the dao of filial devotion. Seen here, the father’s desires simipliciter are not the object of xiao, but rather the father’s good. Had Shun obeyed his father’s wicked desires, he would have allowed his father to fall into an even graver situation, and become a true disgrace to his family.

Additionally, Shun shows how xiao can require the modification of ritual propriety. Mencius’ disciple Wan Zhang cites a passage from the Book of the Odes that when a man is to marry, he ought to inform his parents before hand. He then recalls the story of Shun’s marriage to the two daughters of Yao, of which Shun did not inform his parents. Wan Zhang notices the conflict: if Shun has exemplary xiao and sons ought to inform parents of their nuptials, how is Shun still xiao?

Mencius’s response is on two fronts. First, in his immediate response to Wan Zhang, he states Shun knew his parents would not allow the marriage to proceed. But Shun also knew that marriage between man and wife is “the greatest of human relations” (ren zhi dalun 人之大倫). If Shun had told his parents, he would have had to do without this relation and then become resentful toward his parents. In this response, Shun’s awareness of the rendao – i.e, that marriage is the greatest of human relations necessary for human flourishing – trumps the ritual form of informing his parents. But how is this still xiao and not selecting greater goods over filial goods? Shun remains xiao because a) he does not allow his parents to act improperly in denying him the marriage, and b) he does not allow for hateful resentment to arise between him and his parents. In this case, being xiao in the ritual sense will lead to a breach of xiao in a daoist sense, and so Shun decides to forego the most proper ritual sense of xiao (though one could argue carrying

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65 Mencius, 5A:2.2.
through with the marriage is a ritually proper form of xiao as well, so li is not dispensed with entirely).

Now this does not necessarily mean Shun (or Mencius) thinks li unimportant to fulfilling xiao. Rather, the ritual aspects of xiao service are themselves part of the rendao. Indeed, in a sense, Shun actually chooses a path that mitigates the negative impact on the ritual aspects of xiao as well as the affective. If Shun had informed his parents, he would have either had to do without the marriage, or defy his parents expressed wish. Such a marriage in defiance would certainly breach the ritual duties of sonship more than a failure to ask for the parents’ blessing. Shun’s decision to not inform his parents is based in both a concern for the dao of human life, and the dao of ritual interaction. He knows that because of his parents’ dispositions, there will not be harmony between the various aspects of life that bear on his marriage. He chooses to follow the dao in what he considers the most important degree, electing to formally fail a ritual mandate, but so that the greater ritual and human flourishing is maintained.

A different section of the Mencius offers a different justification for Shun’s decision to not inform his parents. There Mencius teaches that of the three unfilial acts, the most severe is to fail to have children (wu hou 無後). Obviously if Shun had informed his parents, their resistance would have kept him from having children. Mencius, then, treats Shun’s pursuit of having children as the same as if he had informed them.66 Here again, we see that Shun recognized the rendao aspect of xiao service. In their lack of virtue, his parents would have denied Shun the ability to have children and thus impeded

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66 Mencius, 4A:26.
his xiao and the honor due to their ancestral line by Shun’s extending it. Consequently, Shun’s decision is to pursue his parents’ good, even though they do not recognize it as good.

These aspects of Shun’s life provide three general characteristics of daoist care. First, daoist care is done from a place of affection rather than resentment. Shun tries actively to avoid forms of attending to the dao that would lead to a breach of filial love for his parents. Hence, as with the preceding forms of xiao service, daoist care is only truly xiao when it flows out of filial devotion. Daoist care for parents cannot be pursued from a posture of moral superiority or self-righteousness that stands over-against one’s parents. It is a seeking for parents’ good out of filial love, and as such constitutes an essential form of how filial love is actualized – true love does not enable immorality, but challenges it.

Second, daoist care allows for minimal breaches in typical forms of xiao, when the good of the parents and their desires are in conflict. Of course the xiao son will conform to forms of filial devotion as much as possible, but immoral parents mean the formal perfection of xiao is at times impossible. As with Shun, the son of immoral parents cannot simply abandon his filial devotion, but neither can he be blindly obedient to his parents’ whims. Rather, he must develop a complex and nuanced hermeneutic that allows him to recognize what is good for his parents, and how can he pursue this good in ways that does as little damage as possible to typical forms of xiao, while accepting the lack of perfection in this regard.

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Third, daoist care shows that xiao is filial love actualized in obedience not simply to one’s parents, but also to the dao. With moral and just parents, this is also active but invisible because to follow good parents is to follow the dao. When faced with being xiao toward parents such as Gu Sou, however, it is apparent that obeying the dao and obeying the parent are not synonymous. In Shun’s filial hermeneutic, he gives priority to following the dao over-against following what his parents expressly command or will. Thus he engracts his filial love not in blindly obeying his parents, but in obeying the dao. This is because filial love is actualized in pursuing the good, both in general so as to be an honorable descendent of one’s ancestors, and in pursuing a parent’s good. Understanding and obeying the dao is the root of filial love and obedience rather than obeying commands as such.

4.2. Parental Remonstration

Popular conceptions of filial piety in the Confucian tradition tend to portray it as blind obedience to one’s parents. However, this is caricature rather than truth; xiao is anything but blind obedience. In this section, we examine one of the starkest themes of Confucianism that demonstrates the complexity of obedience within xiao. Parental remonstration (jian) concerns the Confucian idea that children ought to offer moral correction to their parents. There are, expectedly, important qualifications that maintain the filial character of this correction. But in general, parental remonstration demonstrates the obediential element of xiao is toward the dao as much as it is towards one’s parents.

In early Confucianism, the central passage on parental remonstration is Analects 4.18: “In serving your father and mother, subtly remonstrate (jian 諫) with them. If you see that they do not will to follow your advice, be even more reverent and do not disobey
them (bu wei 不違). Labor for them, and do not be angry.” On one level, the passage is fairly straightforward – a constituent feature of serving one’s parents is the willingness to offer them jian. However, given the qualification that the son should not “disobey” (wei) his parents, this leads to an important question regarding the specific content and meaning of both remonstration and obedience.

What would it mean to argue for the need to remonstrate with one’s parents if, in the end, disobedience is ruled out? For example, imagine one’s father wanted to steal from a neighbor and asked the son to assist him. Does Confucius mean to teach it is best to tell one’s father stealing is wrong, but then aid in the robbery if he persists? Heiner Roetz presents one option for resolving the conflict inherent in the bu wei of Analects 4.18. He argues there are two ways to render wei here, one meaning “do not resist” and the other “do not abandon your purpose.” In reconciling these readings, Roetz asserts a dichotomy between the two readings as a struggle between authority and virtue. The question is as he sees it is whether the child will be obedient or will be virtuous and what psychological stage the agent has reached in order to act a certain way. The agent understands bu wei depending on what level or morality he or she is functioning.

In Roetz’s schema, performing jian and being bu wei are part of the movement toward virtue as a part of psychological development towards true morality – it is a transcending of the familial obligations for more general virtue. The problem with this is threefold. First, in the context of Analects 4.18, rendering wei as “perseverance” does not seem to make sense of the charge to be “ever more reverent” (you jing 又敬). Second, it

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68 Roetz, Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age, 59.

69 Ibid., 59-61.
imports anthropological assumptions of modern psychology equating moral and cognitive development, which are debatable at best on their own. Most importantly, Roetz’s interpretation posits a division between familial obligations and virtue – not a tension, but a claim that filial obedience is not an exercise of virtue. Under Roetz’s reading, one is left wondering in what sense does being *bu wei* define filiality? Does it not seem to more define being *ren* or generally virtuous than the perfection of filial obligations? In order to develop a better reading of how virtue and family respect intersect, it is imperative to understand the function and meaning of *jian* and *wei*; given that *jian* here excludes *wei*, discerning the contours of the latter provides a helpful starting point.

When asked to give an explanation of his definition of *xiao* (which alerts us to a complication in the passage) Confucius explains that *bu wei* means that a child should serve his parents with ritual propriety while they are alive, when they die, and in ancestral sacrifices. In this context, *wei* is not simply failing to follow commands, but rather is a failure to abide by a form of lived filial devotion. Analects 4.5 contrasts *wei* to *ji* (closeness or proximity to something) in teaching that a gentleman does not *wei* from benevolence but holds tightly to it (*ji*). Here, *wei* describes actions that create enmity, distance, or are a de facto abandonment of a relationship.

In light of this sense of *wei*, Confucius’s definition in *Analects* 4.18 becomes clearer. He means that *xiao* sons ought not abandon their parents by disobeying the ritual forms of filial devotion. To depart from *li* in service to one’s parents is to create a breach in the parent-child relation, one that offends the closeness and intimacy of the relationship. This in turn makes remonstration profoundly clear. The exhortation is not a paradox of remonstration and obedience, but rather an emphasis that the son’s
remonstration should not produce a cleavage in the parent-child bond. Rather, the remonstration must come from and persist in the closeness of the bond. When correction is denied, the son must not let himself be divided from his parents, but must allow his devotion to not waver. Thus, Zhu Xi comments that in this context, being reverent (jing) means remaining in harmony with one’s parents.70

Confucius’ advice to avoid divisions between parent and child points to the peril of remonstration for filial children. This then leads one to wonder why remonstration is advocated in Confucianism in the first place. The answer lies in the Confucian understanding that the parent-child relation participates in the dao – i.e., it is part of the moral order and not simply pursued for its own sake. As such, the son’s responsibility is to help his father pursue the Dao and serve him in this way, especially when the father resists the Dao.71

In later Confucian tradition, the necessity of filial remonstration is often compared to the task of ministers who ought to challenge the ruler when he is in the wrong. The Xiaojing employs such a comparison when Zengzi asks if xiao consists of “simply following the father’s commands (zi cong fu zhi ling 子從父之令).” Confucius points out that just as the ruler would be in dire straits if he did not have ministers willing to confront his misjudgments, so too the father needs a son willing to contend (zheng 争).

70 Zhuzi Yulei, Lunyu 9, Li-ren 2, Shi fumu ji jian chapter, 3.
71 Nuyen, “Filial Piety as Respect for Tradition”, 210; Alan K. L. Chan, “Confucian Ethics and the Critique of Ideology,” AP 10 no 3 (2000): 245-61. Nuyen argues that in view of his conception of filial piety as respect for tradition, bu wei here means “never to place oneself outside of the tradition of one’s forefathers.” Chan helps to explore this line of thought more. Chan’s article shows how Confucianism understood that even if a tradition is corrupt, radical change could be effected from within through a process of gradual reform. This insight provides a helpful parallel for xiao. Just as a tradition cannot reform itself as that tradition by severing the present from the past, the son cannot reform the father (his “tradition”) by cutting off the relationship that ties them together. It is only within the “tradition” of xiao that remonstration can occur.
with him.\(^{72}\) If the son is willing to remonstrate, then the father will not fall into inappropriate conduct, and hence this remonstration is an essential form of *xiao* in the eyes of the *Xiaojing*.

The harmony of the father and son that must be preserved in remonstration is then not itself absolute – as though the son might not truly correct his father – but flows from the logic of remonstration. Remonstration is undertaken out of love for one’s father and the *Dao*, and a desire to see one’s father do what is right. The goal of filial remonstration is neither the demonstration of the son’s moral superiority, nor the “maturation” of the son as an equal moral agent to his father. Rather the son must remonstrate because he seeks to help his father follow the *Dao*.

The *Kongzi Jiayu* relates an account that demonstrates this point succinctly. Once, Zengzi was out in the garden and accidentally cut a melon root. His father became angry and took a cane to beat Zengzi. In response, Zengzi lay down to receive this correction and remained there until his father knocked him unconscious. After waking, Zengzi thought it was most filial to smile at his father, and thank him for the educational experience. Later, he wanted to visit Confucius, but Confucius would not grant him entry because he was upset with Zengzi’s failure to be *xiao*. Confucius teaches that the true *xiao* son would have not allowed his father to beat him in such a manner. In not fleeing, Zengzi allowed his father to fall into “un-fatherly crimes” (*bufu zui* 不父罪), and failed to protect him morally.\(^{73}\)

Thus filial love for one’s father and filial obedience to the *Dao* leads to the necessary practice of filial remonstration. Yet, throughout the process of remonstration

\(^{72}\) *Xiaojing*, 15.

\(^{73}\) *Kongzi Jiayu*, *Liu Ben*, 10.
the son cannot forsake the filial love that prompts remonstration in the first place. More than obedience to the dao, filial remonstration is obedience to the dao including the natural and virtuous love for one’s father. Hence the manner of remonstration is significant. If I was in a store with my father, and chose to loudly castigate him for being impolite to an employee, this would be remonstration, but would fail to be filial. The son’s remonstration must remain a vessel of filial love if it is to be xiao remonstration.

The Liji provides some guidelines about what this sort of remonstration looks like. First, the son should maintain a humble spirit (xia qi 下氣) and a harmonious expression (yí se 怡色), and remonstrate with a soft voice (rou sheng 柔聲). This is the first step of remonstration, and ideally the most the son would have to do. The thrust is that the son should not let his physical appearance or manner of correction communicate anything but reverence and appreciation for his parents. Certainly there are pragmatic reasons behind this, but they are secondary to the attitude of respect and love the son must possess toward his parents.

But what if genteel remonstration has no effect? The same text encourages the son to be even more reverential and filial, and then repeat the remonstration once his father is in a better mood. Yet there are times when this advice would anger the father. In this situation, the son ought to remonstrate more strongly. However, even if his parents become angry and beat him until he bleeds, the son must “not dare to be angry or resentful, but remain reverential and filial.” Of course, the end of the passage is not meant to encourage sons to allow themselves to be beaten. Rather, it emphasizes that the

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74 Liji, Nei Ze, 18.

75 Ibid.
son’s attitude toward his parents must remain within the movement of filial love and devotion, and he ought not allow himself to fall into the rather easy place of complaint, resentment, and anger.

What this means for our theme of love and obedience is this: in filial remonstration, the son’s way of communicating his love for his parents leads to the form of how the remonstration is expressed and his response to the negative reception of his efforts. This filial love can lead him at times to formally challenge his father’s commands or father’s wishes, but still maintains a form of obedience that actualizes this filial love. Without being enacted in obedience to the Dao and the desire to have his parents obey the Dao, the son’s love remains simply on an emotional plane. This devotion is good, but in true filial love the son desires his parents to love and pursue the Good. Without the remonstration to help them along the way, the son’s love fails to be truly performed.

4.3. The Father’s Dao

A final form of daoist care concerns how a son ought to “keep his father’s dao.” The locus classicus for this theme is Analects 4.20: “A person who for three years refrains from altering (gai 改) the ways (dao) of his father can be called xiao.” In general, it seems the content of this particular passage must be set within the context of the three year’s mourning period (see chapter 7). However, it does raise an important question regarding one’s living parents that was indeed central to early Confucian discourse. How can or should a son honor and keep his father’s dao when his father is immoral? Does being xiao require keeping an immoral dao because it was the way of

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76 Analects, 4.20.
one’s father, or can xiao involve negotiating the tension between the immoral father and the Dao?

As Jiyuan Yu points out, there is an intrinsic creativity involved in son’s keeping their father’s dao: xiao can involve the creative extension or expansion of a father’s way of life. But it is clear that with a moral father such creativity is not juxtaposed to loving obedience. With the immoral father, however, filial obedience and love require nuanced moral reasoning in order to maintain the shape of xiao toward the dao. Confucian tradition suggests two strategies for resolving the problem of the immoral father. Following the standard trope of the concealment case, many Confucian thinkers resolve the problem through the son’s abandonment of duties that create a conflict with the father, chiefly of a political nature. The second, found primarily (if not solely) in the Xunzi establishes a foundation for reasons which a son may justly not follow his parent’s commands, while remaining xiao, but departing from their explicit commands. As with the case of king Shun, the conflict between the Dao and the immoral father’s dao cannot be perfectly resolved – there is an unfortunate “moral remainder.”

_Analects_ 13.18 is the first instance of what is often called the “concealment case.” In this passage, Confucius hears of a man named “Upright Gong” (zhi gong 直躬) whose father stole a sheep, and Gong reported this to the authorities. Confucius replies that in his village, those who are upright act differently: instead of turning a father in, they would conceal his crime. Another version of the story is in _Mencius_ 7A: 35, where Mencius teaches that if Shun’s father had murdered a man, Shun would have taken his

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77 Jiyuan Yu, “Transmitting and Innovating in Confucius”

78 _Analects_, 13.18.
father and hid him away, abandoning the rule of the empire.¹⁷ Popular readings of these cases argue that they represent the absolute priority of the family over the state. Indeed, these cases are central to Liu’s thesis that Confucian ethics is a “consanguinism” that neglects or subverts communal social action for the particular relationship with blood-kin.²⁰

However, there are important qualifications that contravene such a reading. Following Haiyu Wang, Confucius’ critique of Upright Gong is primarily about the definition of “uprightness” (zhi 直).³¹ The term zhi means something like the carpenter’s square – it is firm, measured, and morally involves a coherent and consistent moral hermeneutic. Can a son who turns his father over to public shame be zhi – i.e, is such an action consistent with his filial love and devotion?

As Lijun Bi and Fred D’Agostino point out, this is not to say the son must actively mislead authorities or that he must assent to his father’s conduct.³² The decision to conceal (yin 隱) is not subterfuge, but a resistance to publicly shaming or renouncing one’s father. Such service is accorded the father not only because of the son’s devotion to him, but because of the dishonor the father’s crime will bring shame upon the ancestral lineage. With the concealment cases, the question is whether the son will be improperly abandon xiao follow the dao. The son is not required or even advised to actively subvert the legal process of crime and punishment. However, he is required to keep to the moral

³⁷ Mencius 7A:35.


Dao while also maintaining his xiao. If he attempts to follow the dao while neglecting his xiao obligations, he will actually fail to keep the dao itself and hence cannot be rightly called “upright.”

In the case of Shun, the tension between xiao and dao takes a different turn. Because Shun was not only Gu Sou’s son, but also the king who had founded laws, his xiao infringed upon his role as ruler. If his father had indeed broken the law and murdered, Shun could not have failed to enforce the laws, nor submit his father to them. Mencius explains that Shun would not have hindered his minister Gao Yao from exercising the law against Gu Sou, and Shun would have abandoned his role as ruler. It is important to recognize that obedience to the dao permeates the entire episode. Shun’s decision is a balancing act between obeying the dao of being a son, the dao of a ruler, the dao of being a superior, and the dao of being a law-maker. In this case, Shun provides his father xiao service by negotiating his filial devotion among other obstacles his father has created.

Of course, Shun has the advantage of the being the ruler – he is free to abandon the throne because he is the pinnacle of the political body. While it is true that the xiao of the ruler was an important political complication in ancient China\textsuperscript{83} – how should a ruler keep his father’s dao if he was in error or had bad policies? – it was not the principal political explored philosophically. In the Han dynasty, several texts explore the other side of this political relationship, often in tragic ways. Rather than the ruler, Han authors were

\textsuperscript{83} Patricia Ebrey, “Imperial Filial Piety as a Political Problem,” in \textit{Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History}, 122-40. Ebrey masterfully illustrates that xiao was not a neat mechanism for political power, but created many obstacles in the imperial system. Primarily, this was from the perspective of officials who attempted to advise kings in particular ways – sometimes, xiao worked to their benefit, and other times it was a hindrance to their plans for the empire.
interested in how the minister (chen 臣) deals with the demands of xiao in the face of a father’s immorality.

The story of Shi She, a minister of the state of Chu, is related in the Han Shi Wai Zhuan. In this narrative, Shi She is presented as an excellent minister who loved righteousness and whom the king commissioned with important management positions. Along the way to fulfill his duties, Shi She witnessed a murder, followed the perpetrator, and was shocked to find it was his own father. Immediately, Shi She returned to court and declared his dilemma: to submit his father to the corporal punishment for murder would be unfilial, but to fail to enforce the ruler’s laws would be disloyal. Then, Shi She crawls to the place of the axeman and insists that he be executed for failing as a minister. Though his ruler begs Shi She to allow himself to be forgiven, Shi She insists the laws cannot be relaxed and he is ultimately beheaded, though praised by moral men for his excellence.84

Shi She’s story testifies to the often-tragic decisions xiao can involve, but his story also points to some fundamental characteristics of daoist care. Because Shi She loves his father and honors him, he knows that he cannot contravene the xiaodao and submit his father to punishment at his own hand. However, his love for his father is in line with his love for the dao and his obedience to it. Hence, Shi She cannot go about his business as if nothing has happened, and he cannot stand by when there is a breach of law committed. In a very real sense, Shi She’s obedience to the dao leads him to take his father’s place, with Shi She becoming the criminal in place of his father. Thus Shi She’s xiao concerns both love for his father – so that he will not simply turn him over to be

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84 Han Shi Wai Zhuan, 2.14.
executed – and obedience to the dao. Moreover Shi She’s filial love, which if it is proper is in accord with the dao, requires his obedience to the dao in order to be fully enacted as filial love.

According to this line of thought, the demand of xiao of love for the father and obedience to the dao primarily results in the son’s abandonment of a good for the sake of his ability to be xiao. A different strategy is that of Xunzi in the chapter entitled “Dao of the Son.” Xunzi begins his reflection with the conclusion that “to follow the dao and not the ruler, to follow what is appropriate (yi 义) and not one’s father, this is the greatest of human conduct.” In developing this point, Xunzi asserts a juxtaposition between the dao and the father’s commands (ming 命), noting that there are three reasons why a xiao son can legitimately not follow his father’s ming. First, if the command would result in anxiety for the parents, but not following the command would give them comfort, the xiao son ought not follow the command “out of his heartfelt affection” (nai zhong 乃衷). Second, if the command would result in the parents’ humiliation and not following it result in their glorification, the son ought to not follow out of appropriateness. Third, if the command brings about base actions and not following results in the parents’ adornment, the son should not follow the command out of reverence.

85 Cecilia Wee, “Hsun Tzu on Family and Familial Relations,” AP 17 no 2 (July 2007): 127-39. Wee argues that in general, early Confucians had three ways of configuring the role of family relations within social morality: 1) familial care can be extended to other relations, 2) non-family social relationships and roles can be helpfully defined in familial terms, and 3) the family is the primary place of moral obligation and duty. Wee argues that while Confucius and Mencius can be said to hold all three, Xunzi can only convincingly be said to hold to number 2, which she suspects is due to his emphasis on the sage-king and ruling agency. While I have some reservations about the way Wee has categorized the three configurations of family roles, in general I find her thesis to be convincing.

86 Xunzi, Zi Dao, 1.

87 Ibid.
For Xunzi, *xiao* requires obedience not simply to the parent’s explicit commands, but to the *dao* and *yi* – even and especially when parents’ commands oppose the good. Whether such commands come out of a parent’s ignorance or malevolence is left open. Xunzi’s focus is on the sense that *xiao* demands caring for a father’s place relation to the *Dao*, or the *yi* of his desires, rather than on the *dao* that he himself practices or proclaims. This depends upon an understanding that *xiao* is part of the way the son negotiates the relationship between himself, his parents, and the *dao*. To abandon the *dao* or what is *yi* would be not only to do what is immoral, but it would fail the movement of filial love as we saw above. Hence filial love requires obedience to *Dao* and what is *yi*, over and above the mere explicit wishes of a parent. It is a loving and seeking their good, even when they do not know or desire the good.

In summary, we can gather together several aspects of parental care in terms of the father’s *dao*. When there is a breach or division between the father’s *dao* and the *Dao*, Confucians argue univocally that the *Dao* has a higher priority. The catch is that because following the *dao* includes caring for and loving the father, the *xiao* son’s obedience to the *dao* does not resolve the problem of the immoral father. In such cases, the son knows that obedience to the father may not be possible, but neither can he abandon the filial love for his father. Yet his filial love is still enacted by his desire to follow the *dao* and have his immoral father achieve and do good things, even if the father refuses to pursue good things. Conversely, in the case of an immoral father, *xiao* is enacted filial love through obedience to the *Dao* so that the son pursues the father’s good, even if the father does not himself desire his own good.
As with the other forms of parental care, daoist or moralist care concerns the confluence of filial love and filial obedience. This form of care does reveal that at times, xiao involves a filial obedience that must take on objects apart from the parents and their commands. However, the constant of parental care is that filial devotion and love for parents is perfected, fulfilled, and actualized in forms of obedience. In the next chapter, we will turn to the ceremonial forms of xiao – the mourning rites and ancestral sacrifices – in order to develop this theme into forms seen as “greater” by the Confucian tradition. Yet the principle at the heart of xiao remains the same: xiao is both the affection of filial love for one’s parents and the enactment of this love in concrete, obediential forms.
CHAPTER 7

SERVE THE DEAD WITH \textit{LI}: FILIAL LOVE AND OBEDIENCE IN CEREMONIAL \textit{XIAO}

1. \textit{Introduction}

In \textit{Analects} 2.5, the corollary to serving living parents is twofold: bury them with \textit{li} and sacrifice to them with \textit{li}. The present chapter examines these aspects of \textit{xiao} in order to develop and intensify our presentation of \textit{xiao} as the virtue of filial love enacted in concrete acts of filial obedience. Most importantly, we will gain here a more illuminating ritual aspect of sonship, which is perhaps the most unique gift the Confucian school has for Christological reflection. We saw in the previous chapter that \textit{li} was considered by early Confucians as a constitutive feature of \textit{xiao}, even in the giving food and nourishment. However, we now shift from the \textit{qu li} of \textit{xiao} to the \textit{yi li} of \textit{xiao}: \textit{xiao} as ceremonial enactment of filial love in filial obedience. Early Confucians identified proper mourning and burial of parents as the penultimate expression of \textit{xiao} devotion, and carrying out ancestral sacrifices as the ultimate form of filiality. Hence in examining the enactment of filial love through obedience in these ritual forms, we strike at the very heart of the Confucian conception of filial agency and devotion.\footnote{Amy Olberding and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds. \textit{Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought} (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2011). Olberding and Ivanhoe’s volume represent one of the few Western philosophical engagements with the Confucian practices of mourning and ancestral sacrifice, or at least treating them as philosophically significant and interesting. Unfortunately, this is predictable: since few scholars of Chinese}
2. “Bury Them with Li”: Filial Love and Obedience in Mourning Rites

The rites of mourning, bereaving and interning parents offer a unique locus from which to consider the relationship between filial love and obedience in xiao. Unlike the forms of xiao discussed in the previous chapter, the forms expressed in rituals surrounding a parent’s death cannot take the parent as an object of obedience, at least not conventionally. Modern cultures do possess mechanisms for mediating a parent’s explicit desires such as the written will, which can reassert the logic of obedience into mourning rituals. However, these mechanisms (if ever present) are not part of the early Confucian conception of xiao; rather the virtue of li or ritual propriety takes center stage as the obediential element.

Consequently, mourning rituals and ceremonies offer a helpful complication to the notion of xiao as inculcating mere obeisance in children. In these rituals, filial obedience is both formed by and in-forms filial love in a perichoretic movement. In this presentation, I approach detailing this relationship in three steps. First, I develop a basic grammar of filial obedience and love in the mourning rites through distinguishing between mourning (sang 喪) and grief (ai 哀). Then, in order to explore this grammar, I examine an important negative case of filial sacrifice, surrounding the death and burial of Confucius’ beloved disciple, Yan Hui. Third, I present Confucius’ philosophical justifications for a three-year mourning period, and show how the logic of filial love and obedience function in this justification.

philosophy in the West have thought xiao worthy of much reflection, there is little reason to think the mourning rites and ancestral sacrifices might be philosophically (rather than socially) significant. Hence, my engagement in this chapter will largely rest on historical scholarship; the chapter itself, though, is an argument that these practices are a fecund resource for philosophical study of early China.
As a brief prolegomena, we can first identify some of the basic ritual forms. As we saw in the last chapter, *xiao* is considered a form of service to one’s parents. The burial rituals in the Confucian tradition have several ceremonial aspects that are required in order for the ritual to be carried out with propriety, and thus constitute filial service. Moreover, there are several traditions of these rituals, variations among them, and we cannot expect the rituals to have been universally applied or followed. However, texts such as the *Yili* and the *Liji* testify to the coherence of the ritual forms despite their complexity, and help identify the basic components.

Early Confucians were concerned with five fundamental aspects of the internment rituals. First is the temporal component. At the very least, Confucius advocated a mourning period of three years for mourning parents during which time the bereaved was restricted from working in government or public service. This aspect of ritual mourning was a particularly fertile source of philosophical and moral dilemma for many. Key to the temporal aspect was that the length of mourning depended entirely upon one’s relationship to the deceased. How long I mourn my uncle, cousin, family friend, neighbor, or father, will depend precisely on the relationship I have to them, and thus I might

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3 I am here particularly thinking of the Sang Fu and Shi Sang Li chapters of the *Yili*, and several chapters from the *Liji* such as Sang Fu Xiao Ji, Sang Da Ji, and Wen Sang.

4 For a very helpful table outlining the calendar of mourning and sacrificial rituals, see K. E. Brashier, *Ancestral Memory in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University University Asia Center, 2011), 58-59.
mourn for three months, five months, nine months, or at most three years when it is a parent who has passed.⁵

A second component, as in many cultures, was rules concerning mourning clothing (sang fu 喪服). In general, this involved shunning luxurious clothing and donning unhemmed clothes (zhan shuai 斬衰).⁶ Also, the official service attire, such as the cap (guan 冠) worn by those in civil service was exchanged for a hemp cord to simply tie up the hair.⁷ The proper garments, again, would reflect the social relation that directs the mourning process, and would change at intervals in the mourning process. The clothing aspect is closely tied to the third, that of food and drink. Quite simply, it was expected that mourning children would abstain from rich fare and refreshment, and take simpler meals during the mourning process.

Fourth, there were liturgical components of the burial rite. This would involve wailing properly, reciting the correct words of honor and eulogy, and properly laying out the vessels used in the burial. The burial rite itself involved washing and clothing the deceased in a prescribed schedule that was intrinsic to the ritual form, and was performed at particular periods (e.g., three days) in the mourning period. The fifth aspect involved the materials of the burial itself. Mu-chou Poo has shown that in early China, the typical burial pattern was placing a wooden casket within a vertical pit, and the higher the

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⁵ We could also add there is a temporal component in the rush to mourn once one hears of the death of a beloved one. See, for example, the Liji, Ben Sang 奔喪, or “hurrying to mourn.”

⁶ Yili, Sang Fu, 1.

⁷ Liji, Sang Fu Xiao Ji, 1.
deceased’s social or political status, the more coffins were used in their burial. In early Confucianism, forms of burial communicated the status both real and perceived by the survivors of the deceased. Within the family, it was expected that the son would bury his father with funerary objects in two coffins, with the outer coffin adorned if possible.

2.1. Distinguishing Sang and Ai: A Ritual Grammar of Filial Love

It is already clear from the foregoing that ritual propriety is essential to whatever occurs in the mourning and internment practices – the mourning of a parent’s death is clearly connected to concrete ritual forms. However, our first step must be to understand why ritual propriety in this context is part of the perfection of xiao and not merely about li itself. Amy Olberding has been one of the few philosophers to give a serious reading to the Confucian conception of mourning and bereavement, and her work is an excellent guide to answering this question. Olberding makes much of the distinction in Confucianism between ai 哀 and sang 員. On a basic level, Olberding defines ai as “grief,” i.e. the “emotive responses associated with bereavement, the immediate and often apparently involuntary sorrow occasioned by loss.” Sang or “mourning” she defines as “the organized ritual activities socially sanctioned as the proper and public forms in which sorrow is expressed.”

There is a great deal of specificity to the ritual aspects of mourning – children ritually mourn their parents in ways distinct from how they might mourn an uncle or even

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their own children. However, it is tempting to think of grief as a general emotion of sorrow, taking particular objects of course, but with the emotion being categorically identical across objects. Olberding provides a clarification that can help us understand grief in *xiao* mourning as *xiao* grief, i.e., as an extension of filial love rather than simply sorrow of bereavement.

In a separate essay, Olberding emphasizes that grief is not an emotion that “at the moment of loss, we summon into existence.” Rather, grief strikes the bereaved or seems to act upon us at the time of loss. As such, she argues that grief comes from somewhere, specifically that “grief has its origins in beliefs about loss and these beliefs, far from coming unbidden, require at least our tacit, if not explicit assent.” She clarifies further that, “to grieve…I must have an antecedent conviction about the value of what is now lost.” Or, as she also puts it, “I grieve because I have shaped my life, self-consciously or not, in such a way that it is governed by convictions about value that make grief possible.”

The thrust of this is that when it comes to filial mourning, the extant grief arises out of the cultivation of filial love for one’s parents, i.e., filial love is the condition that makes mourning for one’s parents possible. As Olberding specifies, “when [Confucius] urges that we grieve for our parents, he does not enjoin us to summon sorrow at the moment of loss, but to achieve a pattern of relation throughout our lives with our parents

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11 Ibid., 138.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.
that will prompt grief when the moment arrives.”\textsuperscript{14} This “pattern of relation” has been suggested in the previous chapter: a life of xiao service to one’s parents is precisely that which is necessary to cultivate the capacity to grieve for one’s parents.

We can note here a significant feature of the relation between xiao and mourning. If xiao is the virtue of filial love enacted in filial obedience, then grief is a natural extension of this virtue. The term ai 哀 is paranomastically related to the Chinese word for love (ai 愛), suggesting at the least that the two concepts share a common thrust. Based on this line of thought developed by Olberding, I suggest that the mourning rites (sang) are the ritual forms that enact and perfect filial love, in this case experienced as filial grief. On this view, the mourning rites are predicated upon the existence of filial grief, thus suggesting a priority on filial grief. Indeed, Confucius suggests such a relationship when he says, “What could I see in a person who in holding a position of influence is not tolerant, who in observing li is not respectful, and who in overseeing the mourning rites does not grieve?”\textsuperscript{15}

However, the point in distinguishing between sang and ai is not to argue for the priority of one over the other simpliciter, for it is also the case that Confucius cannot conceive of a person who grieves but fails to participate in the mourning rites. The point is rather that one cannot possess filial grief without enacting that grief in ritual, just as it is impossible to have ritual propriety without filial grief. In a chapter from the Liji, mourning rites are described as the vehicle for ku jin ai 哭盡哀, literally meaning

\textsuperscript{14} Olberding, “I Know Not Seems,” 161. Emphasis mine.
\textsuperscript{15} Analects, 3.26.
“weeping that exhausts one’s grief.”\textsuperscript{16} Elsewhere, the \textit{Liji} teaches, “when there is deep grief and sorrow in the heart, it causes a change to the body exteriorly.”\textsuperscript{17}

The mourning rites can in this sense be understood as the necessary means of expression of grief. Yet in order for grief to be bereavement, it requires instantiation in rituals of mourning. Hence, the rites do not merely symbolize grief. In early Confucianism, perhaps the central conviction regarding the mourning rituals and grief argues that the ritual forms conform to the nature of filial grief, as a natural expression of it. This passage from the \textit{Xiaojing} illustrates the point nicely:

The Master said, “When \textit{xiao} children are in mourning for a parent, they weep without prolonged wailing, they participate in the \textit{li} without any attention to their personal appearance, they speak plainly without trying to be eloquent. They are uncomfortable in elegant clothing, are unable to find any enjoyment in listening to music, and have no appetite for fine food. This is because of their feelings of grief and distress.”\textsuperscript{18}

Here, the ritual forms of mourning are said to align with the natural movement of grief. For \textit{xiao} children who possess the virtue of filial love and obedience, their grief moves them toward particular types of clothing, abstinence of food, and neglecting enjoyment. It is almost as if the \textit{Xiaojing} author thinks that \textit{xiao} children would mourn in the same way even if there were no rituals to guide them. Similarly, the \textit{Bai Hu Tong} teaches “when \textit{xiao} sons lose a parent, they are so overcome with grief and weeping that they do not eat for three days, and allow their body to become weakened and unwell.”\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{footnotesize}
16 This formula is part of the justification for mourner’s acts as described in the \textit{Ben Sang} chapter.

17 \textit{Liji, Wen Sang}, 1.

18 \textit{Xiaojing}, 18.

19 \textit{Bai Hu Tong} 10.2, 6.
\end{footnotesize}
Again, we see that the ritual forms of not eating for three days are supposed to be natural to the xiao son, i.e., follow the course of his grief.

This approach is apparent in exigent circumstances in which the form of ritual can be adapted. In the book of Tan Gong from the Liji, Confucius’ disciple Zilu pitied impoverished sons, since they do not possess the material means to properly bury their fathers according to the rules of li. Confucius responds by noting that the poor can achieve li in a sense: “If a son can only wrap the body round from head to foot, and inter it immediately, without a shell, that being all which his means allow, he may be said to discharge all the rites of mourning.” Confucius seems to mean here that regardless of his material lot in life, a xiao son’s grief will inherently and intrinsically seek expression in the proper rites. Even if the full propriety of these rites is materially unattainable, such as the double coffin, there can nonetheless be a striving for the proper ritual form. Because of the son’s xiao grief, the impecunious bereaved can still actualize ritual propriety, or at least participate in it as much as he is able.

At the same time, this configuration of mourning rituals as the expression of xiao children’s grief shows the ritual forms of li are neither incidental nor only important inasmuch as they express the child’s grief. In the passage of the poor son, Confucius’

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20 Cf. Erica Brindley, “‘Why Use an Ox-Cleaver to Carve a Chicken?’ The Sociology of the Junzi Ideal in the Lunyu,” PEW 59 no 1 (January 2009): 47-70; Ha Poong Kim, “Confucius’s Aesthetic Concept of Noble Man: Beyond Moralism,” AP 16 no 2 (July 2006): 111-21. Brindley argues that the Confucian model of the junzi as moral ideal was likely not as universalized as popularly conceived in modern scholarship; rather, it was possible that the junzi ideal was implicitly and effectively barred from certain people who lacked opportunities for radical upward mobility within such a hierarchy” (49). Obviously our passage is beyond the scope of her essay, but her work raises the question of whether Confucius thinks the poor son can fulfill li in some way, or if he can fulfill li in such a way as to meet the requirement of the junzi ideal. Under her schema it seems unlikely. However, Kim argues that Confucius understood the junzi aesthetically, i.e., as a person who saw the beauty of ren 仁 and thus pursued it. Under an aesthetic schema, then, perhaps the impoverished son truly is fulfilling the full measure of li.

21 Liji, Tan Gong II, 172.
point is that the child’s grief for his parent is manifested in pursuing ritual propriety, and as such, even when the fullness of propriety is unattainable, the striving itself is a perfection of ritual propriety. Thus, the *xiao* son is not simply bereaved and expresses his grief in a ritual idiom, but there is the inherent recognition by him that his grief *ought* to be expressed in ritual forms. That is, the *xiao* son recognizes it is not enough to feel sad for his father, but that he must weep, wear certain clothes, abstain from food, and bury his father properly.\(^{22}\) The difference is substantial: it is not that the son has love for his parents and then in a second act expresses it ritually, but that he understands ritual to be a constitutive aspect of what it means to love his parents.

Now we come to the obediential center of filial mourning. In Amy Olberding’s configuration, the *xiao* son has cultivated over his lifetime the ability to mourn his parent’s death. This involves, then, the desire to mourn for them *properly*, with *li*. The *xiao* son’s mourning is the enactment of his filial love, but within a concomitant movement of filial obedience to the rules and demands of ritual propriety. In a most basic sense, this means the son learns from early on what proper mourning is, what ways of eating and clothing he should assume in mourning, and how one’s parents ought be buried. As such, the *xiao* son is concerned that he knows the proper ritual forms and is able to carry them out.

For example, let us imagine my father has died. It is one thing if I lack the means to bury him properly, and thus can only wrap his body in cloth and dig a hole for him. However, it is quite another if I have out of either ignorance or spite failed to do what is

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\(^{22}\) Kim-chong Chong, *Early Confucian Ethics: Concepts and Arguments* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2007), 110-11. Drawing upon Xunzi’s ritual theory, Chong argues that the perfect balance of emotions (*qing* 清) and ritual form (*wen* 文) is the “middle course of ritual” that is defined as doing things rightly and balancing oneself. Our use of *xiao* and *li* is in a different idiom than Xunzi’s functionalist concern about ritual, but it is nonetheless a helpful analogy.
within my means to accomplish. My grief would not be expressed as xiao grief if I failed to secure my father two coffins and settled for only one – according to Confucian li, my actions would be treating him as a son rather than my father. To take an example from the American context, imagine a son was arranging his father’s funeral, and opted to set up a dance floor and DJ at the wake. Regardless of how fervently the son might argue he expresses grief best through club music and club dancing, we would justifiably point out that the funeral event calls for particular kinds of expression of grief, and creating a dance scene is simply not one of the acceptable forms of bereavement.

However, the filial son’s obedience to li is not simply about following cultural rules or norms. It is, rather, concerned with the expression and perfection of the love that manifests as filial grief upon a parent’s death. The ritual forms guide the bereaved, and thus allow filial love to be both perfectly filial and perfectly love. Accordingly, one major concern of early Confucianism was to emphasize that the li guide the expression of grief and mourning into proper channels. As we saw above, part of the mourning rituals involved fasting for three days, or the cultivation of bodily suffering in the expression of grief. The Xiaojing warns that this practice surely is important, but must not be abused. “After three days, the son will eat, in order to instruct the people that the living should not be harmed for the sake of the dead. The mourning son ought to suffer physically out of his grief (hui 毀), but ought not extinguish his nature (bu mie xing 不滅性).”23

Li are not just vehicles for enacting grief, they are also guardians of that grief so that it may be virtuous, filial grief. A son who would grieve for his parents may feel so bereaved he wishes to fast for three weeks rather than three days. If practiced, such

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23 Xiaojing, 18.
mourning would actually dilute the nature of filial grief, since it would harm what the parents had left behind. Moreover, since grief is the sorrow at loss, it is impossible for the son who would fast himself on to death’s doorstep to properly recall his parents. His grief would not be focused on his parent – honoring him, weeping for her, and having sorrow at his passing – but would be focused on the son, who laments the fact that he is bereaved.

Another way of seeing this same principle regards the ways in which other responsibilities can mediate the ritual forms of filial devotion. In the *Bai Hu Tong*, the author emphasizes there is a need to distinguish in ritual propriety when it comes to the use of the ritual cane (*zhang*杖). According to the *li*, a *xiao* son ought to grieve in such a way that his body is weakened, so he will require a cane for support after three days of fasting. The *Bai Hu Tong* argues that there are two exceptions: the young boy and the married man, saying that they cannot become ill (*bu neng bing*不能病).24 Though not explicit, the logic seems to be that a young boy will risk his life too much by fasting in such a way. Likewise, a married man – presumably himself a father – may risk failing in his duties towards his family, which are part of his *xiao* duty.

Consequently, inasmuch as the ritual forms of mourning enable the “exhaustion of grief” (*jin ai*尽哀), this means two chief things. First, ritual forms of mourning are the way in which grief is expressed: grief is not merely a sentiment, but culminates in specific acts of honoring the dead and bereavement. Second, filial grief is not merely expressed by the mourning rites, but is *actualized*, i.e., filial grief becomes and remains the perfection of filial devotion as it participates in and is guided by *li*.

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24 *Bai Hu Tong* 10.2.6.
Grief then, following Olberding, is the culmination of the virtuous cultivation of filial love – a life-long pursuit of *xiao* love and devotion to one’s parents makes grieving for them possible. At the same time, this love is intrinsically formed in and expressed through the enactment of ritual forms. In the case of mourning for one’s parents, this enactment depends upon the presence of filial obedience to the form and structure of the rituals, i.e., it is an obedience that flows out of the concern to be good sons or daughters. In this schema, we can hardly hope to divide filial love from filial obedience, for such a division would make both unintelligible. What we gain, however, is the ability to distinguish these forms of filial life, while yet understanding their circumincession.

2.2. Grieving for Yan Hui: Filial Lessons from a Classic Case

Our discussion of the distinction between *sang* and *ai* has provided us a fundamental grammar of how filial love and obedience are related in the *xiao* mourning rituals. Within that distinction, we will now visit a classic case of mourning (though a negative one) to see how filiality is at play, and open up more features of this account. Yan Hui was Confucius’ most beloved disciple, and ostensibly his most trenchant who Confucius confessed to have loved like a son. Sadly, Yan Hui died young, preventing us from having any record of his distinctive approach. In spite of the sparse historical records about Yan Hui, his place in Confucius’ circle makes him an important figure in the later philosophical tradition, and of course in earlier texts such as the *Analects*. Particularly important is the handful of passages in the *Analects* surrounding Yan Hui’s death and how his loved ones and friends mourned his passing.

The *Analects* makes it very clear that Confucius’ grief over Yan Hui’s death is significant. At the time of Yan Hui’s death, he is said to have exclaimed, “Heaven is
destroying me!” (**Tian sang yu 夭喪予**) and was accused by some of his students of grieving excessively. The latter point is interesting since the word used here for excessive grief, **tong 惨**, is defined in the *Shuowen* as “a great amount of weeping” (**da ku 大哭**). An important part of the mourning rite was how one wept for the deceased, including intensity of weeping. Ostensibly, the disciples felt Confucius’ weeping was not appropriate to his relation to the deceased. Confucius’ response was “if I cannot mourn in this way for a great man (**fu ren 夫人**), then whom can I mourn like this?”

This raises an important question in light of a passage from the Han text *Kongzi Jiayu*. According to this text, Confucius found his son Bo Yu mourning his mother’s death deeply and continuing to mourn after the mourning period had passed. Confucius, seeing this behavior, criticizes Bo Yu for being without ritual propriety. A cynical view of these two passages might say that Confucius holds his son to a standard he himself is

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25 *Analects*, 11.9.

26 Ibid., 11.10.

27 *Analects* 11.10; See Olberding, “The Consummation of Sorrow: An Analysis of Confucius’ Grief for Yan Hui,” *PEW* 54 no 2 (July 2004): 279-301; Joshua Seachris, “Yan Hui’s Death as a Threat to Confucius’ Expression of Virtue: a Further Look as the Master’s Grief,” *AP* 18 no 2 (July 2008): 105-22; Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Allotment and Death in Early China,” in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, 181-84. Olberding makes the fascinating argument that Confucius’ mourning in the case of Yan Hui has two foundations. First is a general vulnerability and openness to others, so that they are able to affect us. Second, Yan Hui represents to Confucius an opportunity to be a “different” Confucius: “The Confucius who teaches Yan Hui cannot be the same Confucius who teaches Zigong and the other students...Confucius is, thus, in this relationship something he cannot otherwise be” (296). Hence Confucius ultimately mourns for Yan Hui because he represents a way for Confucius to actualize himself. Seachris adds to this by giving it more specificity, arguing that what Confucius mourns in Yan Hui is the ability to express his virtue through Yan Hui’s practice of Confucius’ teaching and modeling the virtuous life.

In his essay, Csikszentmihalyi shows that the line of though by Olberding and Seachris is similar to classical interpretations of the passage, such as that of Zhu Xi. However, there are also two other ways Confucius’ mourning had been interpreted, which are not mutually exclusive to the “fulfillment of the virtuous self” reading: 1) Confucius’ grief concerns whether or not he would be a sage with Yan Hui as his helper, and 2) as an expression of Confucius’ love for Yan Hui as surrogate son and student. My approach emphasizes the latter, though following Csikszentmihalyi, I do not think it necessary to argue for this reading over-against the interpretation offered by Olberding and Seachris.

28 *Kongzi Jiayu*, 42.29.
not willing to live up to, or perhaps that there is an implicit sexism in the mourning rites for a mother. Yet, there are two different characteristics of mourning at play here.

For Confucius, it seems he wants to provide some space within *li* to reflect the quality of the relationship in addition to its nature. He argues it is because Yan Hui is a “great man” that his profound weeping is justified. Hence, Yan Hui’s character and his relationship to Confucius allow for intensification in the wailing aspect of ritual propriety. Bo Yu, on the other hand, mourns too long, which is to say that he disrupts the ritual form itself, which is temporally shaped (see above). If Confucius had rent his clothes for Yan Hui or had taken to wear the unhemmed clothing, this would also alter the ritual form. The apparent difference between Confucius and Bo Yu in these accounts is Confucius maintains the integrity of the ritual form – he wails, though with many tears – while Bo Yu, even although out of genuine grief, alters the ritual form.

In light of this, a pair of passages of the *Analects* discussing Yan Hui’s burial become quite significant. The first relates that Yan Hui’s father, Yan Lu, asks Confucius to give him a carriage that he might sell in order to afford an outer coffin for his beloved son. Confucius declines saying, “Whether talented or not, we must all call our son a son (*ge yan qi zi 各言其子*). My son Bo Yu died, and I provided for him a coffin, but not an outer coffin.”

Although Confucius clearly recognizes Yan Hui was talented – and we might add, seems to think the opposite of his own son30 - he instructs Yan Lu that fathers must think

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29 *Analects* 11.8. Recall from above that burying with an outer coffin was a service a son performed for a father. However, if the son died before the father, then the father as head of ritual burial was not supposed to provide an outer coffin according to the *li*, at least in Confucius’ eyes.

30 See, e.g., *Analects* 15.13.
of their sons as sons. Confucius implies the doctrine of *zhengming* 正名, or the rectification of names, which basically teaches that names communicate roles and help us discern how we ought to act towards others based on what roles they play in a given context.\(^{31}\) In this context, Confucius means to say that if Yan Lu provided Yan Hui an outer coffin, this would not merely be an exhibition of exceptional fatherly grief and love. Rather, it would also be to ritually treat Yan Hui as Yan Lu’s father, since it is a son’s responsibility to bury a parent with an outer coffin.

Yan Lu desired to celebrate his son, and no doubt Confucius was sympathetic to that desire. Yet his concern was that burying Yan Hui in a manner that is outside of ritual propriety would not allow Yan Lu to love Hui *as a son*. Implicit in this is the possibility that Confucius meant Yan Lu ought not celebrate Yan Hui for being a great person, or at least he should not attempt to bury him extravagantly *because* Yan Hui was a great man. Rather, Yan Lu needed to mourn for Hui’s as a father. As such, Yan Lu’s burial of Yan Hui should not be with an outer coffin, for then Yan Lu’s love and affection for Yan Hui would not express *fatherly* affection.

The second significant passage tells us that after Yan Hui passed, his fellow disciples wanted to give him a lavish burial (*hou zang* 厚葬), and Confucius said, “you cannot do that.” The disciples gave him the lavish burial regardless. To this Confucius said, “Yan Hui looked at me as a father and I have been unable to treat him as a son. It is not I; it is these others at fault.”\(^{32}\) Similar to the previous passage, the central question is what kind of burial Yan Hui should have been given, and it is clear Confucius thinks the

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\(^{32}\) *Analects* 11.11
lavish burial – presumably the kind given to a parent – was inappropriate, and laments it. What is important for our purposes, though, is the logic at play in his disapproval.

Two facts stand behind Confucius’ response: a) Confucius truly loves Yan Hui like a son, and b) Confucius has no active role in providing the burial for Yan Hui that he finds ritually improper. This leads to two very important recognitions. First, we can see that when Confucius tells the disciples not to celebrate Yan Hui with a lavish funeral, he does so out of something akin to fatherly affection. In other words, he sees that as a father figure to Yan Hui, his responsibility is to ensure he is buried properly by his friends, and wishes a proper burial for Yan Hui. This is quite momentous: Confucius’ affection for Yan Hui is ostensibly what prompts him to desire a non-lavish funeral for him, rather than merely accept the need for one not so lavish.

Second, Confucius perceives that he has failed to treat Yan Hui like a son in spite of the fact that he had instructed the disciples against such a lavish burial. In other words, he thinks the failure of the ritual form itself is a failure of fatherly affection for Yan Hui. Of course, Confucius had fatherly sentiment, but due to the lavish burial, he was unable to grieve for Yan Hui in a fatherly manner. Hence, since the ritual form was disrupted, Confucius sees that his fatherly role is also disrupted, even though he accepts no blame for this disruption.

Altogether, the episode of Yan Hui’s death lends clarity precision to the circumincession of filial love and obedience. Confucius clearly argues in the Analects that loving a son and treating a son as son are ineluctably bound together. Conversely, the love a son has for a father is fundamentally tied to how he treats his father. The rituals of mourning are not merely a means to express sorrow, but they are ways in which human
relationships are extended, honored, and enacted. As such, in mourning a son must mourn as a son and mourn for his father as a father or mother as a mother. This requirement means that the filial love implicit in grief and the ability or desire to mourn inherently involve obedience to ritual forms. For these ritual forms tell us how to enact filial love.

Moreover, we can see from this episode that ritual failure is not simply a failure of expression, but a failure of love. The rites allow the father to enact paternal love or allow the son to enact filial love. If the son does not bury his father properly, he may have love – but is it filial love? In other words, if the son does not obey the ritual forms of propriety that tell him how a son ought to mourn for his father, can his mourning truly be an enactment of his filial relationship? These passages force us to conclude the answer will be “no.” Xiao, then, requires filial obedience to the structure of li not simply as a means to express filial love, but as a way of making filial love enacted, perfected, and fulfilling its filial character. Without this filial obedience, the son may have sentiment, but it is not clearly discernible as filial love.

2.3. The Three Year Mourning Period and Filial Love and Obedience

A very important ritual discourse in early Confucianism surrounds the period for mourning parents, which was traditionally for three years. Due to the amount of discussion, we cannot hope to review the entire conversation here, but will examine the most famous instance of this debate. In Analects 17.21, Confucius’ disciple Zaiwo, questions the logic of the three year mourning period, arguing one year seems sufficient. During Confucius’ time, the mourning for a period of three years involved not only wearing certain forms of ritual clothing or food; it also required absence from public service or offices. Zaiwo finds this feature of the mourning period problematic indeed.
He claims, “If a junzi 君子 (“gentleman”) for three years does not perform the li, then the li will surely be destroyed. If for three years the junzi does not practice music, then the music will surely be ruined. Within a year, the old grain is already gone, and new grain is already ripe; the woods used for making fire have served their purpose within a year – surely one year is good enough.”

Zaiwo’s argument is not a simple foil, but is rather a compelling Confucian argument. His appeal to the figure of the junzi is the first significant move. In Confucian philosophy, the junzi or “gentleman” is the moral exemplar, since the moral ideal of the sage (shengren 聖人) is exceedingly rare. Junzi are those individuals who practice ritual propriety (li) and appropriate conduct (yi 義), who treat others with benevolence (ren), and who seek wisdom or love learning. Zaiwo’s argument is that if these moral exemplars retreat from public life for three years, the rituals and music (which is intrinsic to court and public rituals) will fall into decline, since the masters of the rituals – or at least those concerned for their integrity – will be replaced by lesser people.

The argument here is compelling because Confucius taught that the presence of junzi does have a moral effect on the society in question. In a remark about another disciple Zijian, Confucius argues that if Lü (Zijian’s home) was without junzi, then Zijian could not have become a junzi himself. 33 Similarly, Confucius argues that if a junzi were to go live among the Yi barbarian tribes, his presence would remove the crudeness of that people. 34 Hence, Zaiwo takes a complementary position, arguing that if the junzi were to abandon his public life, his absence would have ruinous effect. Of course, there is an

33 Analects 5.3
34 Analects, 9.14
obvious flaw in the argument Zaiwo puts forward: his claim about the result of the junzi’s absence would only be cogent in the case of a single junzi in a social group, or the far less likely possibility that all the junzi lose their parents at the exact same time. Other than this issue, however, his logic is sound at least by Confucian standards.

The second important move he makes is to appeal to the grain and wood drills. Edward Slingerland notes that Zaiwo is building upon the argument of Analects 14.40 where Zizhang implies the three year mourning period is impractical, but by adding a cosmological dimension. As Slingerland puts it Zaiwo is suggesting that, “if people want to model their behavior on Heaven, the one-year Heavenly cycle should be their standard.”35 Again, Zaiwo makes appeal to a very central idea of Confucius, that Tian is its own guide to wisdom. In Analects 17.19, the disciple Zigong begs Confucius to reconsider his decision to no longer speak, saying if Confucius doesn’t speak, how will the followers follow what is right? Confucius responds, “Does Tian speak? The four seasons continue to cycle and all living things live in them – does Tian speak?”36 In other words, Confucius suggests his own teaching is simply following Tian, and thus Zaiwo’s argument that a one-year mourning period more closely follows Tian smacks of a winning stroke.

Confucius’ response begins with a question: “If after a year you could eat good rice and wear embellished clothes, would you be unperturbed (an 安)?” Zaiwo answers affirmatively, and Confucius continues, “if you would be unperturbed then do it. When a true junzi mourns, he does not desire rich foods, when he hears music he takes not

35 Slingerland, Analects, 209.

36 Analects, 17.19.
pleasure, and even at home he cannot feel unperturbed. Thus he cannot do what you have suggested.”

According to Confucius, the junzi is unable to mourn in any other way than a three year mourning period. The term an 安 means “able to feel at ease” or “with rest and comfort” and its absence is anxiety, discomfort, and restlessness. When Confucius speaks of the junzi being unable to be an, he means an interior feeling of uneasiness. If the junzi would abandon the rites of mourning after one year, he would feel sorrow and uneasiness regardless – his filial love would know it required more time to be perfectly enacted.

In his critique of Confucianism as “consanguinism,” Liu Qingping has pointed to Confucius’ response to Zaiwo as a key text. He argues that Confucius’ response focusing on whether Zaiwo would feel an 安 suggests Confucius is elevating “moral emotion” over natural desires as the root of conduct. There are, however, two problems with Liu’s reading. First and foremost, in early Confucian texts, an and its opposite lü 憂 (anxiety) are only emotions in one sense. They are how a person “feels” but they are also tied to rational perception. A person can only feel at ease when she is satisfied that her obligations have been fulfilled – hence there is in resting or anxiety an intellectual judgment regarding one’s moral obligations. Second, Confucius’ response to Zaiwo is not a general principle that emotions are more trustworthy than natural desires (passions?). Rather, his advice is only specifically in terms of mourning for one’s parents in response to the “natural” argument of Zaiwo regarding Tian.

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37 Analects 17.21.


39 See Ing, 175-203. Ing gives a wonderful treatment of how the Liji deals with anxiety in rituals, which involves discernment of the proper ritual form and what the ritual will produce. As such, he shows how anxiety is not simply an emotion, but also an intellectual discernment.
Combining the two, Confucius’ response is really is a critique that Zaiwo has failed to understand how the mourning rites comprise his filial obligations to his parents as part of the tiandao. The junzi cannot “feel at ease” without the three year mourning because it is what he owes to his parents naturally. That is, the junzi discerns that three years is a fitting time to mourn for his parents and thus would be at ease without mourning for the fitting timeframe. It is impossible to think that every junzi would simply have the emotional personality to desire to mourn for three years. Rather, the junzi’s mourning requires his ability to understand (and not just feel) the relationship between his filial obligations and his devotion to his parents.\(^{40}\)

After Zaiwo leaves, Confucius gives a sense of the sort of moral discernment the junzi makes. He exclaims, “how Zaiwo is without ren! A child is born and lives three years, and only then is he or she released from the parent’s bosom. Indeed the three years of mourning is the norm throughout the empire. Did Zaiwo not have three years of love (ai 愛) from his parents?\(^{41}\) The first part of this response is greatly important, since it grounds the three years’ mourning period in the natural processes of human life. Because children learn to walk, talk, and gain social awareness in the first three years of life, their parents must constantly be present to care for them, granting them little to no autonomy

\(^{40}\) Alice Yao, “Engendering Ancestors through Death Ritual in Ancient China,” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Death and Ritual*, ed. Sarah Tarlow and Liv Nilsson Stutz. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 581-96. Yao argues through mortuary evidence in Neo-lithic China that the conceptions of gender in this period were variable in terms of rituals. Because we have to decide how to commemorate the dead, this allows for some legitimate “construction” of identity in these rituals. In regards to the case of Zaiwo, this has an interesting relevance, for as we saw with the case of Yan Hui, Confucius thinks the mourning and burial rites ought to reflect the familial relationship. This is precisely because such acts constitute or construct the relationship. With Zaiwo, it is not simply that he must do what feels easy to him, but by mourning only one year, Zaiwo would “reconstruct” his relationship with his parents and remember them differently than he should.

\(^{41}\) *Analects*, 17.21
since the *autos* is hardly formed. This attentive care means that a parent’s life is wholly
directed toward his or her child, or at least centrally directed as caregiver.

According to Confucius, the *junzi*’s uneasiness is not merely because he loves his
parents. Rather, the *junzi* recognizes the care he received from his parents. This touches
upon one of the debated points of Confucian doctrine on *xiao*, whether or to what
measure it is based on reciprocity. Based on this passage, there is the need to distinguish
between a reciprocal aspect of *xiao* and a *quid pro quo* structure. The *xiao* son’s three
years’ mourning does not seem reciprocal in the sense that it is my doing a deed that is
required based on the fact that some benefit was done in my favor. Rather, it is an interior
sense of obligation, a recognition that my parents have done something for me, and my
response of gratitude involves, when possible, the hope to do something for them that
somehow resonates with their care for me. Confucius seems to see the three years’
mourning in this way, flowing out of the recognition of what was done and a natural
desire to reciprocate – but this does not necessarily mean the *junzi* sees this as mere
obligation.

The importance of this point is it shows us again how filial love requires
enactment in filial obedience. Filial love cannot be filial love unless it recognizes the gift
of the parents’ care. Because parental love is received through concrete acts of care,
reciprocating that love cannot be filial or filially expressed except for in the concrete
ritual forms that have some resonance with the original care. Quite often today, one sees
cars memorializing a deceased loved one with an etching of their name, or sporting a “in
memory” tattoo. If Confucius were to see this, I think his response would be something
like this: “The sentiment is nice, but how exactly do these things lead to the perfection of
your grief?” It would be one thing if your loved one was a car or tattoo enthusiast, but most of the time, there is little about these actions that resonate with or express the significance of the relationship to the deceased.

Hence, Confucius argues the three-year mourning period both reciprocates and \textit{reflects} the foundation of the parents’ care. In this period a son would not be able to eat fine foods or enjoy leisure due to constantly thinking about his mother or father – what devoted parent can fail to see the symmetry? This neither means nor requires a firm parallelism between the three years of parental care and three years’ mourning. Not every mourning act needs a one-to-one correspondence with what parents might do for children. The thrust is that there is a resonance, a harmonious sense of proportion and balance between these two forms. Consequently, the filial son requires the ability to understand and be obedient to the \textit{li} of filial mourning in order to communicate the sort of love and devotion he desires to communicate.

A final note can be made before discussing the theme of ancestral sacrifices. Confucius does not neatly distinguish between a parent’s caring for a child and the parent’s love (\textit{ai 爱}) for that child. A child cannot discern the difference between a parent’s love and a parent’s care – both are manifest and active in the other. Thus, inasmuch as Confucius means the three years’ mourning reciprocates parental care, it has this same circumincession. We might say one’s community, family, or even deceased parent cannot discern the difference between a child’s love and a child’s ritual mourning. Both need one another in order to be actualized in their fullness.

3. \textit{“Sacrifice to Them with Li”: Filial Love and Obedience in Ancestral Sacrifices}
For our final investigation into the relationship between filial love and obedience in xiao, we turn to the ultimate xiao ritual act – sacrifice. Ironically, although ancestral sacrifice was a key element of Confucian spirituality and practice, the topic is treated only seldom in central texts such as the Analects and Mencius. In hindsight, this is reasonable due to the culture of ancient China, in which ancestral sacrifice was part of the popular cultus. Unlike the Confucian rules for mourning that opponents like Mozi attacked, early Chinese thinkers by-and-large accepted ancestral sacrifices with little need to justify them.

Consequently, in many ways ancestral sacrifices stand as part of the complex of beliefs and convictions that are the undercarriage for the Confucian philosophical school. In order to unravel the significance of this practice for the Confucian understanding of filial love and obedience, we will thus need to engage in a somewhat creative reading. There is little in the way of philosophical justification for the sacrifices, but there is good evidence that early Confucians reflected upon a) what occurred within the sacrifices and b) what is necessary for them to be successful or good sacrifices. In the remainder of the chapter, I will provide a Confucian account of the significance of ancestral sacrifices for xiao by giving a deep engagement with one of the few extended discussions of the topic, found in the Ji Yi chapter of the Liji. However, to contextualize and assist this reading, there are some general observations to be made about the Confucian approach to ancestral sacrifices.

According to Keith N. Knapp, the original meaning of xiao in the Western Zhou was primarily the offering of ancestral sacrifices. Knapp further argues that the

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42 See Mozi, “Against the Confucians, book 2” (Fei Ru Xia 非儒下).
Confucian school reinterprets xiao in two principal ways: (1) the school specifies the object of xiao from a general ancestry to one’s parents in particular, and (2) develops a conception of xiao as obedience, due to a clear distinction between dead and living states for the ancestor. The connection Knapp fails to make and that I wish to assert is that the early Confucians also understand the ancient ancestral sacrifices within a schema of obedience, not only in service to living parents.

One fundamental feature of the ancestral sacrifices in early Confucian philosophy was that these rituals were seen as products of the great sage-kings of old. The Zhong Yong speaks of the ancient sage Shun offering sacrifices in the ancestral temple (zong miao 宗廟) as part of his famous wisdom and virtue. It also praises the filiality of the Zhou founders King Wen, Wu, and the Duke of Zhou by pointing to their sacrificial habits. In a very real sense, this ancient reasoning is part of the Confucian justification of the ancestral sacrifice. Not only is it an ancient practice, but it was shaped and followed by the ancient sage-kings, who are the moral exemplars regarding virtue, and especially proper family relations.

Another feature of the ancestral sacrifices that lend it important context is its role in the Zhou political structure. In his landmark study on early Chinese sacrifice and warfare, Mark Edward Lewis states that ancestral sacrifice was central to the Zhou political imagination. There are several reasons why this is the case. First was because sacrifice intrinsically involved killing, and as such required authority to undertake it. In

43 Keith N. Knapp, “The Ru Reinterpretation of Xiao.”
44 Liji, Zhong Yong, 17.
45 Liji, Zhong Yong, 18-19.
this sense, sacrifice was linked to warfare – the right to undertake war and the right to
sacrifice were parallel. Second, the ruler or lord was typically the sacrificial agent of the
most important sacrifices. For example, only the Zhou emperor was allowed to sacrifice
to the Zhou ancestors. Thus political power and authority was weaved into the logic of
the sacrificial system.47

More recently, Lewis has argued that during the late Warring States period, the
ancestral sacrifices began to be marginalized precisely for political reasons. “This
reflected the need to marginalize the Zhou monarch, who remained the apical figure of
ancestral worship and the cult of Heaven. . . [t]his shifted emphasis from the temple,
where offerings were made to deceased human ancestors, to the outdoor altar, where
sacrifices were presented to spirits of nature and the cosmos.”48 Given that early
Confucians were characterized by their defense of Zhou culture, rituals, and monarchial
structure, this is a significant historical remark. For early Confucians, the ancestral
sacrifices were not solely about proper arrangement of the family, but they understood
the sacrifices as intrinsic to the flourishing of the wider society and empire under the
Zhou model.

This should not, however, lead us to imagine that Confucians thought the
ancestral sacrifices were merely a pragmatic means to political ends. While it is
impossible to isolate the familial values from the wider social and political ones in early
Confucianism, this is not because the family is subsumed under the polis. Rather, the
ancestral sacrifices function at the same difficult crossroads as the entire Confucian

47 See Ibid., 21. “…the privilege of personally killing the sacrificial victims offered to the
ancestors marked paramount authority in the state and in the subordinate lineages.”

185.
doctrine of *xiao*: it concerns virtue within the family, which concerns the virtuous person in general, which has political and social effect. Indeed, it is hardly possible to imagine what political significance ancestral sacrifices could have unless the ancient Chinese society took ancestral relationships as important and worth cultivating.

This general context gives a basic insight to the significance of the ancestral sacrifices, but what can we say about their structure? Patricia Buckley Ebrey’s study on family rites in imperial China argues an important point regarding the texts of the early Confucian tradition: these texts are in a sense “mechanisms” of managing ritual. In other words, texts like the *Ji Yi* are not merely descriptions of liturgies, but are arguments about what the rituals should be and how they should be performed. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the ancestral rites described in the *Ji Yi* or other early texts represent how ancestral sacrifices were actually practiced or not.

At the least, Ebrey provides a modest yet helpful account of what these sacrifices probably looked like. Thus, we will quote her description at length:

> The living communicated with their ancestors through solemn divination, reports, prayers, and offerings of wine and food. Those in charge of states, fiefs, and families were privileged and obliged to officiate at rites; those not so privileged were expected to assist in whatever capacity was appropriate to them. The chief sacrificer had to purify himself in advance through abstinence of varying duration. At the appointed time, he would enter the consecrated ancestral shrine, bow, prostrate himself, and make offerings of food and wine. He was assisted by variety of attendants, including those who prepared the food, took charge of the utensils, performed divinations, and pronounced prayers. During major sacrifices, one boy or man, preferably a son of the chief sacrificer, would act as a vessel for the spirit of the ancestors. This impersonator also needed to undergo purification before the rite. During the rite he would drink the wine offered to the ancestors and in trancelike fashion passively allow the spirits to animate him. A ritual expert would

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interpret the ancestors’ wishes, which in the standard liturgy of the I-li was to convey blessings.⁵⁰

There is one thing in particular to note in this description before examining the Ji Yi. Here we see that the chief sacrificer in the ancestral sacrifices is the eldest son, and as such the structure of the rite depends upon this son. Because of this requirement, the ancestral sacrifice is an intrinsically filial ritual. Consequently, all the other actions or agency in the ritual are directed around and toward the filial nature of the rite, and depend upon this filial agency for its coherence in the ancestral sacrifice.

3.1. Interpreting the Ji Yi

One of the most important and sustained discussions of ancestral sacrifices is found in the Ji Yi 祭義 chapter of the Liji. The title of the chapter means “sacrificing appropriately” or “appropriate sacrifices” and speaks to what is necessary in order to rightly perform the various sacrifices that were part of the early Chinese cultus. Wang E 王锷 argues that the Ji Yi was originally a court text on sacrifice, worship, and ritual during the Warring States period.⁵¹ Specifically, Wang describes this text as one of three chapters of the Liji that “is a specialized exposition of the pre-Qin sacrifice and worship institution and of the varieties of sacrifice, worship, and ceremonial performances that were significant.”⁵² Consequently, the scope of the Ji Yi is much broader than just ancestral sacrifices, concerning offerings to divine figures (tianshen 天神), earth spirits (diqi 地祇), and ghosts (rengui 人鬼). This is significant here because the broader

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁵¹ Wang E 王锷, Liji Chengshu Kao 礼记成书考 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007), 165-69. Wang argues that the Ji Yi in fact seems to predate both the Mencius and the Xunzi.

⁵² Ibid., 160. 《祭义》…则专门论述先秦的祭祀制度和各种祭祀礼仪的意义”
conception of ritual acts and agency hints at the robust metaphysical conceptions that will come to bear in our discussion of the ancestral rites.

The Ji Yi’s presentation of ancestral sacrifices in particular provides a rare vista into the dangers of ritual impropriety for not only the expression of filial love, but for its very existence. In general, the Ji Yi constructs two conceptual schemes for understanding what happens during ancestral sacrifices: the pairs of memory-presentation, and preparation-execution. The first refers to how a xiao son ought to call his parent to memory on the day of sacrifice as yearning to see them, and how the ritual forms communicate the somewhat ambiguous presence of the deceased. The second refers to the xiao son’s focus on how the sacrifice is prepared, both in terms of the material elements and how he approaches it in his demeanor. Following this is the way he executes the rituals, through which the son either exhausts (jin 尽) or negates his filial devotion.

Consequently, filial love can be seen in these passages in two ways, both in the yearning for one’s parent through memory, and in the desire to sacrifice to them. Similarly filial obedience has two modes: obedience to the ritual forms in accordance with li, as well as an implicit structure of obedience to the parents who are made “present” in the sacrifice itself. What is key is the degree to which the Ji Yi shows these aspects are circuminceded in xiao. Not only does filial love intrinsically move toward ritual expression, the rituals of the sacrifices enable the terminus of this filial love to occur.

53 Cf. Brashier. In Ancestral Memory in Early China, Brashier approaches the ancestral rituals through the lens of modern performance theory. While I do not follow this model, my use of memory-presentation bears similarity to Brashier’s presentation.
3.1.1. Memory and Presence in the Ji Yi

The first movement of the Ji Yi’s argument – not necessarily historically, but as it now appears to us – is to explain why the ancestral sacrifices ought not be repeated too often or too infrequently. The answer is that over-frequent sacrificing leads to (ze 則) being troubled, which will then make one (ze) unable to be respectful. Similarly, neglecting the sacrifices will lead to (ze) a negligence of one’s filial duties, which will then lead to (ze) “forgetting” one’s parents (wang 忘).54

With these passages, I would like to emphasize the causal construction at play. James Legge translates ze here in several senses, especially in the indicative:

“Sacrifices should not be frequently repeated. Such frequency is indicative (ze) of importunateness and importunateness is inconsistent (ze) with reverence. Nor should they be at distant intervals. Such infrequency is indicative (ze) of indifference and indifference leads to (ze) forgetting them altogether.”55

Though the passage adopts a rather formulaic construction, Legge sees several readings of ze working simultaneously. In contrast, I argue the passage is much more consistent in its meaning of ze. The word ze generally means “measure” or “rule,” though it also functions as an adverb, e.g. “then.” Treating ze as a temporal modifier suggests the outgrowth of a particular form: an action or disposition begins a form and it leads to or results in (“then”) other actions. In this context, ze specifically seems to mean that the original action – excessive or negligent sacrifices – creates a form or rule that terminates in loss of a respectful demeanor or forgetting one’s parents.

54 Liji, Ji Yi, 1.
55 Legge, Li Ki.
Especially this last clause is significant for two reasons. First because it helps us see that the ritual forms of the sacrifice – in this case, their frequency – have some impact on what happens within the son. Second, it carries the presupposition that forgetting one’s parent(s) is a truly awful consequence, and should be avoided at all costs. In a sense, this is the starting point of the Ji Yi’s initial development, for it points us toward the fact of remembering one’s parents as a) something that ought not be lost, and b) ensconced in the sacrificial idiom. This then leads to the important question of what is the role of memory in the sacrifices, and why is this so important?

One clear reason that the Ji Yi argues there is a risk that infrequent sacrifices will lead to forgetting one’s parents is due to the presupposition that calling one’s parent to memory is an intrinsic and central aspect of the sacrificial rite. Developing this point, the Ji Yi, 2 teaches that the “vigil” or “solemnity” (zhai 齊) aspect of the ancestral sacrifice is “most extensive” internally due to the logic of memory. While undergoing the solemnity the xiao son “thinks on” or “contemplates” (si 思) five aspects of his parent’s life: how he conducted himself at home, how she laughed and spoke, his desires, his opinions, what she enjoyed or the things for which she had fondness.56 Again, we see that the xiao sacrifice involves a preoccupation with the deceased parent, imagining him or her at home, in his or her normal course of life. Moreover, what the son is exhorted to remember about his parent is worth noting: it is not simply acts the parent accomplished for him – as if mere reciprocity were at stake – but who one’s mother or father was, and the distinctive features of what Westerners would call his or her personality.

56 Ji Yi, 2.
Consequently, it seems very clear that the memorial component of this vigil is aimed at establishing the root of filial love. In the *Ji Yi*’s schema, it is insufficient to do the sacrifices physically, even if properly done, without having the memorial aspect of yearning for one’s parent. The physical work of sacrifice ought to have a direct correlation with the internal memorial state of the son. In *Ji Yi*, 4, this theme is given wider explication. There we find the *xiao* of the ancient sage kings was such that they would not forget (*bu wang* 忘) the appearance of their parents, the sound of their voices, or the aims, preferences, or desires of their hearts. From this, it concludes that on the day of a parent’s death – the proper day of the sacrifice – the *xiao* son does not labor, but not because of superstition. Rather, it is because on that day, “his will is extended to his parent, and he would not dare exhaust himself in private matters.”

Physical acts of typical labor are impossible for the son not merely because of a ritual law proclaiming it so, but, according to the *Ji Yi*, because his internal memorial state will not allow anything else. His filial love compels the *xiao* son to think of nothing else but his parent on the day of sacrifice, calling him or her to mind. Typical acts are impossible for him, because he cannot think on them. At the same time, his constant consideration of his beloved parent leads him into concrete acts, the ancestral sacrifice.

In a later passage, the *Ji Yi* shows that this power of memory is also tied to a profound conception of presence or re-presentation. This passage speaks of the sage King Wen and teaches that in his sacrifices, he “served the dead as he served the living.”

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57 Ibid., 4.1.
58 Ibid., 4.2.
59 King Wen 文王 was the initial founder of the Zhou dynasty, doing so under the Mandate of Heaven to lead the people out of the despotism of the last Shang ruler, according to Confucian accounts.
Then, on the day of sacrifice, he would “call his father by his personal name, otherwise forbidden to a son, and it was as if he saw his parent (ru jian qin 如見親).” Continuing it says King Wen’s sacrifices were done with such devotion (zhong 忠) that it was as if he could “see what his father loved and his pleased expression.” It is important to recognize here that the ancestral sacrifice is not simply about remembering one’s parent, but the memorial affectus has a terminus, i.e. the desire to see one’s parent again. This is so strong that the service is to the dead is taken as (ru 如) service to the living.

But is this terminus itself merely left to the realm of wishful thinking, or does the Confucian tradition understand some true movement towards this end? Theologically, the language of re-presentation signifies how Christ’s original sacrifice on the cross is once again made present at each Mass. I argue there is a similar logic to the ancestral sacrifices (though certainly not the same reality), which is to say there is the sense that persons now dead become present once again through the sacrificial rite. This fact means filial obedience enters the ancestral sacrifices in two chief ways: a) to li since the rites themselves are the vehicles of the parent’s presence, and b) to one’s parent in the sense that the sacrifice enables them to be present and thus the service of the rites is for them and not merely for the son’s expression of grief.

For a historical contextualization of King Wen, see Edward Shaughnessy, “Western Zhou History,” in The Cambridge History of Ancient China, 292-351.

60 Ji Yi, 6.

61 Lewis, The Construction of Space in Early China, 121; Roel Sterckx, Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 84-86. It is quite clear that during the late Warring States period there was a growing distinction between living and dead that cannot be neglected. Lewis points to the use of cheaper versions of ritual vessels in this distinction, and Sterckx alerts us to the sacrifices themselves. According to Sterckx, the spirits were believed to receive food differently than living parents, and preferred sacrifice of foods rich in qi 氣 such as blood over against flavored foods. In this context, the ancestral sacrifice seems an attempt to reassert a “blurriness” in the distinction between living and dead.
The simplest statement of this principle is in *Ji Yi* 2. There, after instructing that the son maintains his vigil of memory, it states that on the third day of the vigil he will “see (*jian* 見) the one for whom he is solemn.” The term *jian* here is principally composed of the word for eye (*mu* 目) and as such carries a physical connotation, rather than psychological. Consequently, *jian* is stronger than “seeing” someone in my mind’s eye in some sort of intense memory. Rather, there is an objective quality that results from the sacrificer’s vigil.

Expanding this approach, the *Ji Yi* 3 teaches that as he enters the ritual shed on the day of sacrifice, the son will “seem to see the deceased at the place of the sacrifice.” In this passage, we can clearly see how the ritual forms themselves enable the actualization of the son’s memory. For it is only upon his entering the ritual shed that the son may then “seem to see” his deceased loved one. Further, it is only “in the place of the sacrifice (*wei* 位)” where the seeing occurs. Imagine, then, a son who having spent all day calling his parent to mind was to simply go to bed rather than go through the sacrificial rites. He would not enter the sacrificial house or be in the presence of the ritual table. And thus, according to the *Ji Yi*, he would not see his parent.

From this there are two important consequences regarding the relationship between filial love and obedience. First, the filial love of keeping the memory of one’s parent calls to itself the enacted obedience of performing the rituals according to *li*. In this case, this is in the most general sense of simply doing the ritual, but the point remains

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62 Cf. Brashier, 207-19. Here Brashier lays out a conception of the ancestral sacrifices as “performative thinking” meaning the ritual performance of memory does not simply represent reality, but shapes it.

63 In this passage, *jian* is qualified by the phrase “*ai ran bi* 悼然必”
– without obeying the ritual grammar and practice the son’s memory cannot proceed to presence. Second, and the complement of this, we can see that without obedience to the sacrificial rite, the son’s filial love is damaged. According to the logic of the Ji Yi, if a son calls his parents to mind fervently and truly yearns to see them but then would neglect to sacrifice, what does this mean about his disposition of calling them to mind? Does it not despoil, or at least call into question the filial love that the son could claim to have for his parents?

Hence the ritual forms are presumed in the movement of filial love when it meets the concrete experience of calling to mind a deceased parent. We see this with exceptional clarity in the Ji Yi’s recollection of the ancient sage kings. When the Ji Yi teaches the sage kings’ xiao involved “not forgetting (bu wang)” a parent’s features, it further says that “when a son’s love was perfected, they lived again (zhi ai ze cun 致愛則存); when his sincerity was perfected they were manifest (zhi que ze zhu 致慤則著).” In the context of the passage, it is clear that “perfecting the son’s love (zhi ai)” refers to the sacrificial rites themselves. James Legge, in fact, propitiously renders zhi ai as “giving full play to his love.”

Thus, according to the Ji Yi, the sacrificial rites enable the fullness (zhi 致) of filial love to be actualized. Implicitly, however, there is more to glean from this passage. For the notion that the rites can give full actualization to filial love means it is certain rites rather than other ritual options that would perfect filial love. In other words, it is not simply being mindful of rituals, or even trying to express one’s love in ritual terms.

64 Ji Yi. 4.1.

65 Legge, Li Ki
Rather, it is the sacrificial rite with its prescribed liturgies and movements that enable the fullness of love to become actualized.

Additionally, the “not forgetting” of filial love is, through filial obedience to the rites, given a taste of its terminus through the rites. Because these particular sacrificial rites have been undertaken and completed, the parent “lives” (cun) and is “made manifest” (zhu) to the son. In this, the Ji Yi takes another advance, saying that “being manifest and living unforgotten in his heart, how could the xiao son possibly take comfort in his sacrifices without being respectful (jing)”?66 With this, we see that the filial obedience to the rites enables the actualization of filial love and re-presents the parent to the sacrificing son. Moreover, through the rites, the son’s obedience is explicitly directed back towards his parents, since they indeed live again for him.

This means that the obedience of the rites is filial for two reasons.67 First, because it is tied to the movement of filial love and indeed flows out of the desire of love to see one’s parent again. Second, because the rites enable this telos in some degree, and the rite becomes an exercise of serving the dead parent as if they were living. I do not mean this metaphorically, but that the son understands their presence as so real – even if not in the same way as their material presence – that he truly does understand his parents’ as genuine recipients of his devotion in the rite. That is, the xiao son does not practice ancestral sacrifices merely because he must (out of filial obedience) or because he wishes to remember his parents (out of filial love). Rather, the rites are a way that he continues

66 Ji Yi, 4.1.

67 Wang, 166; Sun Xidan in Liji Jijie 礼记集解, 1207. Both Wang and Sun help show that the rites we are treating here in the Ji Yi are designed to show the “filial dao.” In Sun’s words, the Ji Yi is instructing in “explaining the dao of filial devotion (xiao-qin zhi dao 孝亲之道)” and moreover asserting the unity of service to living and dead parents so that, “because he sacrifices, the son is called xiao (gu yin ji er yan xiao 故因祭而言孝).”
to interact with his parents and truly serve them, offering his parents filial obedience in filial love.

The overwhelming conclusion from this is that the xiao son recognizes that the ritual forms are the proper means to serve his parents when they have died and after they have been sufficiently mourned. In this, he approaches the rites with obedience already as an act of filial obedience. Unless he understands the rites well, he will fail not only to express his own devotion and yearning for his parents, he will fail to serve them properly. The risk for the xiao son is that his parents will become mere memory, unable to be served. Hence he seeks out the proper rites, for by these he can give full play to his love, but also serve his parents according to their ancestral state.

This why the Ji Yi teaches that “only the xiao son can sacrifice (xiang 饗) to his parents.”68 Xiang here is actually not the word for “sacrifice” as such, but it means to host a banquet for another. Here is a sign that the Ji Yi is retaining the classical Zhou understanding of xiao as geared toward the feeding of parents in the sacrificial rite.69 More than this, though, the passage shows that the sacrifice is not a means to assuage the son’s grief, but to celebrate and serve his parents once more. The passage continues that “sacrificing means to turn towards (xiang 饗),”70 and only through this “turning towards

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68 Ji Yi, 5.

69 See Knapp, “The Ru Reinterpretation of Xiao.”

70 Ji Yi, 5. I have followed the suggestion of James Legge in rendering xiang 饗 as a “turning” or “directing” towards the parent. However, I should note this is a difficult passage to interpret because xiang 饗 typically means the countryside or a village. The term does not, so far as I can find, appear in the Shuowen and seems to be used in Warring States texts primarily in these terms. There are two things to recognize then, about its use in this passage. First and foremost, it is a play off the use of xiang 饗 as the term for sacrifice, i.e., xiang 饗 is chosen because it modifies xiang 饗. – in fact, 饗 is composed on the top of the graph by 饗 and on bottom by the term for food, shì 食. Second, classical Chinese identifies specific
his parents” – i.e., calling them to mind and seeking to serve them in the sacrifice – can he then offer a sacrifice that will be like a banquet.

After detailing how the xiao son and his family undertake the ritual, the passage comments, “how ordered they were in their reverence; how pleasing they were in their devotion; how they entirely wished the departed would enjoy the banquet.” There are two things to note here before concluding this analysis. Ritual forms enable the perfect expression of the son’s disposition – it is through the sacrificial rite he expresses his reverence (jing) and devotion (zhong) for his parents. At the same time, he also does this so that his parents will be pleased, and enjoy the sacrificial banquet. Thus, the son’s actions in the sacrificial rite flow out of filial love which in its expression takes the form of filial obedience – his love is in-formed by the ritual acts that allow him to do something that will be pleasing and enjoyable to his parents, and he seeks to do that which they will enjoy out of filial love.

3.1.2. Preparation and Execution in the Ji Yi

The next cluster of the Ji Yi engages the relationship between preparation of the rituals and their proper execution. Just as the son’s filial love drives him to call his parents to mind, so too does it call him to prepare himself, the ritual vessels, and ritual space for the ancestral sacrifice. Execution of the sacrifice is thus the fulfillment or “exhaustion” (jin 尽) of this filial love leading to a simple formula: in ancestral sacrifices, filial love is expressed and exhausted by means of enacted filial obedience.
The passages under concern here are *Ji Yi* 8-11, and 41. In the first passage of this section, the *Ji Yi* teaches the following: “when a xiao son is about to sacrifice to his ancestor, he is a worried (lü 虑) that his service will not be too lax; at the time of sacrifice that everything will be prepared; and he empties himself in order to properly perform the sacrifice.”\(^\text{72}\) Importantly, here we find a dispositional qualification about the xiao son’s preparation. Not only is he aware of the need to prepare everything beforehand, but he is lü – worried, anxious, or concerned – that it be set correctly. That is, the xiao son has an emotional rise in anxiety or worry for the preparation of the sacrifices.\(^\text{73}\)

Also of note is that the preparation is both material and interior. Materially, the xiao son is concerned that the proper instruments and the ritual space are fitting for the rite. The passage says the xiao son will ensure the ancestral temple is repaired before the sacrifice and will have constructed the proper room for his parent’s spiritual residence. All the “myriad things of the sacrifice” will have been prepared, the participants in the ritual will have cleansed themselves properly, and will have donned the appropriate ceremonial dress. Complementary to this, however is the “emptying himself” (xu zhong 虛中), and a carrying a grave and still demeanor, “as if there was nothing greater, as if he were about to lose the ritual vessels.”\(^\text{74}\)

\(^\text{72}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^\text{73}\) Ing, 176. Ing imaginatively locates Confucian anxiety about ritual in terms of ritual failure – anxiety refers to “how Confucians copes with the dissonance between an understanding of ritual where ritual erved to construct an ordered world and their experience with ritual as it sometimes failed to bring about such a world.” This sort of anxiety is likely at play in the ancestral sacrifices discussed in this section. However, it is notable that at least in the *Ji Yi*, anxiety is part of the prescribed ritual order, and thus it requires another explanation.

\(^\text{74}\) *Ji Yi*, 8.
Ji Yi 41 seems to build heavily upon the message of Ji Yi 8 and is worth comment here. According to JY 41, the son ought to give “worried service” (lü shi 虑事) with an ordered and grave heart-mind (qi zhuang zhi xin 齊莊之心). But this “worried service” is directed towards the ritual clothes and instruments, the ancestral temple, and ordering the hundreds of services that are part of the ritual preparation. Here the xiao son’s preparation for ritual includes the ordering (qi 齊) of his heart-mind, and also the ordering of the ritual materials that will be used in the sacrifice.

The dual shape of this preparation is key, since on this basis we cannot mistake the son’s preparation of the ritual elements as merely formal. According to the Ji Yi, the ancestral sacrifice is not simply about the service, but is service done in a certain manner and mode, namely filial love. A good analogue can be found with Christian worship. In preparation for Mass, there is the obvious necessity of collecting the day’s readings and prayers, organizing the hymns, and gathering the host and the wine that will be used in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. However, there is also the need for the priest, the subdeacons, and the laity to prepare themselves in a state of prayer in order to better participate in the ritual. Similarly, the Ji Yi notes that a xiao son’s sacrifice implicitly requires this dual preparation if it is to be a xiao sacrifice.

Significantly, the Ji Yi links this necessary dual preparation with the demands of filial love, rather than a general concern to perform rituals correctly (though certainly not excluding this concern). A later passage states, “the xiao son will (in sacrificing) have such a profound love for his parents (shen ai 深愛) that he will undoubtedly have a harmonious demeanor (he qi 和氣).” He qi here seems to best mean that the xiao son will be unperturbed, but also unaffected by things outside of his sacrificial duties. His deep
love for his parents, then, “prepares” him for the sacrifice by bringing harmony to his qi, which in turn gives him a pleasant expression and an amiable demeanor. Indeed at the conclusion of the passage, we find that having a “stern forcefulness or grave reverence are unfit for service to one’s parents.” Thus the son’s interior preparation for the ritual must actually look a certain way so as to show it stems from a profound filial love.

Based on this passage, we discover a tension in the Ji Yi regarding the son’s interior state. On the one hand, Ji Yi 8 and 41 teach the son to be lü about the sacrifice in his preparation, and yet in Ji Yi 11, we find he should have a “peaceful spirit” (he qi). It is quite possible that we are gaining insight into two different interpretations of propriety in the ancestral sacrifices, and thus varying accounts of what this preparation should be. This reading could prove beneficial, for at the least it would show that our present thesis is still correct: the Ji Yi does argue filial love is expressed in the mode of dual preparation in the ancestral sacrifices, even if the nature of the interior preparation is debatable.

However, what might be gained if we read these as part of one coherent account of filial preparation, as we find them in the Ji Yi today? I think this is a much more illuminating reading, and worth consideration for its philosophical insight. It also has considerable textual support, at least from the view of Ji Yi 11. There we find the “harmonious qi” is identified with being “still and collected” (dong-dong shu-shu 洞洞屬屬), though it is not consonant with being “severe and grave” (yan yan 嚴儼).76

When Ji Yi 8 and 41 speak of a “worried” state, the implication is the son is worried about the preparation of the ritual elements. That is, the xiao son becomes lü in

75 Ibid., 11.
76 Ibid., 11.
terms of the elements external to him, having anxiety that they are ready for the ritual form. It seems, then, that his attention to preparing the material aspects of the ritual in a worried state is an extension of his inner “harmonious qi.” In such a relationship, the lù for the material aspects would be part of the xiao son’s effort to bring harmony (he 和) between the ritual form and his inner state. Moreover, building upon the previous section, since the son is calling his parents to mind his qi is balanced and desiring only their service – in terms of being directed toward his parents the xiao son has no anxiety. However, precisely because his qi is balanced and directed toward his parents, he is anxious that the rest of the ritual’s aspects participate in this same harmony.

The upshot of this interpretation is that the xiao son’s filial love can be seen to both necessarily seek out ritual expression and to recognize the impact ritual failure will have upon filial love. Hence the xiao son is not satisfied with the proper qi, but is worried about the full preparation of the ritual. It is not enough for him to bring a proper emotional state to the sacrifice, but also to properly prepare the ritual itself as a constitutive feature of his filial love.

This leads us to the Ji Yi’s argument that the execution of the ritual is the enactment of filial love through the obedience to li and obedience to one’s parent(s). Ji Yi 8 says that after the preparation, the son enters in the ritual, and “how still and collected is he! It is as if nothing is better in the world, as if he is about to drop the ritual vessels – how the filial reverence in his heart is perfected (xiao jing zhi xin zhi ye 孝敬之心至也)”77 The seriousness of the son’s preparation leads to a particular kind of execution. He walks in still and collected, and he carries out the ritual in a proper emotional

77 Ibid., 8.
disposition. Yet at the same time, he acts wary that he might drop the vessels. Hence, both in terms of his bodily movements and interior disposition, the son is able to “perfect” his xiao through the ritual.

Throughout the next few passages of the Ji Yi this simple theme is intensified. Ji Yi 9 provides a somewhat programmatic construct in teaching that ritual forms allow for the son to “exhaust” (jin 尽) his filial love. In this passage, it emphasizes that the xiao son’s sacrifice “exhausts (jin) his sincerity, fidelity, reverence, and ritual propriety, and he is sincere, faithful, reverent, and proper in the sacrifice (yan 焉). In his movements of advancing and withdrawing, he is clearly reverent, as if hearing commands from his parents, as if they were giving him a task.”\(^{78}\) Typically, jin means to finish or complete, and hence reading it as “exhaust” here signifies how the sacrifices offer the means for the fullness of xiao to be enacted. The use of jin here means that the xiao son calls upon all his sincerity, fidelity, reverence, and ritual propriety for the sacrifice. Moreover, the particle yan 焉 is locative, and means the ritual form is itself the locus for the “exhaustion” of the son’s sincerity, fidelity, reverence, and propriety.

During the sacrifice, there are several movements of approaching and withdrawing from the altar (jin tui 进退). In these movements, the son performs or enacts his filial reverence. On the one hand, this involves filial obedience because the ritual forms demand advancing and withdrawing at particular times in the ritual, and hence to follow the li is intrinsic to the son’s communicating his filial respect. Yet at the same time, he obeys this form and communicates his respect “as if he heard commands from

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 9.
his parents.” Put this way, the Ji Yi suggests once again that the son’s execution of the ritual occurs not simply for the sake of memory, but within the context of re-presentation.

In his execution of the ritual, the son understands his work as service for his parents. The filial love that brought him to the proper preparation has now taken on the form of filial obedience to his parents themselves in hearing their commands and being commissioned (shi 使) for a task. Moreover, we can note the implication that in the sacrificial context, the proper execution of the ritual is what the parent would command or commission of the son. Thus, the son’s filial love is enacted – indeed is “exhausted” – through the ritual forms that direct his obedience toward the li in general, but also his parents particularly.

The upshot of this “exhausting” motif it is clear that without the ritual forms of ancestral sacrifice, xiao would be amorphous and incomplete (bu jin 不盡). The next passage from the Ji Yi shows this with such astounding lucidity it is worth quoting in full:

A xiao son’s sacrifice can be known. In his standing before the sacrifice, he is reverent with a slight crouch. In his approaching the sacrificial table, he is reverent and carries a look of pleasure. In his offering the sacrifice, he is reverent and expresses desire. When he withdraws and stands again, he acts as if he were about to receive commands. When everything is complete and he has withdrawn, he reverently orders his expression so that seriousness of purpose does not leave his face.

This then is the sacrifice of the xiao son: to stand without slightly crouching would be insensible. To approach without a look of pleasure is neglectful. To offer the sacrifice without expressing desire is to be without love (bu ai 不愛). To withdraw and stand, but not as if he were about to receive commands, this is being flippant. After everything is complete and he has withdrawn, to then fail to reverently order his expression, this is forgetting his parents as his source of life (wang ben 忘本). If he were to sacrifice in this way, he would lose his xiao.79

79 Ibid., 10.
There are two essential theses in this passage concerning the execution of the ancestral sacrifice. First, we see that the *Ji Yi* here refers to specific bodily comportment as intrinsically necessary to the sacrificial rite. The son’s posture, his expressions, and the general seriousness with which he moves are all considered part of a good sacrifice. Moreover, they are constitutive features of a *xiao* sacrifice, i.e., a son who wishes to be *xiao* requires attention and obedience to these ritual forms of action in order to express his *xiao* affection.\(^{80}\)

In this light, the *xiao* son’s execution of the sacrifice requires the work of filial obedience in acquiring and following a “sacrificial grammar” for *xiao*. Put differently, the *xiao* son’s *xiao* drives him to learn what forms of composure, expression, and movement are required in ancestral sacrifices, and it drives him to seek to do them properly. Therefore, a *xiao* son’s sacrifice “can be known” (*ke zhi* 可知) by observing the actions of the son taking place in the sacrifice. The word *zhi* 知 here is the basic word for knowledge, wisdom, or recognition of a thing, and so it refers to an objective quality of perception and intelligibility. Consequently, the *Ji Yi* means that the manner in which the sacrifices are conducted – with or without obedience to the ritual forms of composure, expression, and movement – truly does reveal a son’s heart.

Yet there is also more than just a “revealing” or “expressing” function. In the second half of the passage, we find the simplest form of the Chinese copula deployed throughout (*X ye 也 = “X is”). Let us single out one construction to see it at work: “To offer the sacrifices without the expression of desire is to be without love.” In Chinese, this clause is rendered as “*jian er bu yu, bu ai ye* 薦而不欲，不愛也.” The importance of

\(^{80}\) Cf. Brashier, 52-67.
this is that the ye construction is one of identification, of a state of being or existence. James Legge somewhat dilutes the strength of the clause when he translates it as “to present the offerings without an expression of desire (that they may be enjoyed) would show a want of love.”

In the Chinese, the Ji Yi has a much more forceful and frankly more interesting philosophical point. It is not simply that a failure in the ritual form fails to properly express the xiao son’s heart. Rather, the Ji Yi is saying that the failure in the ritual form is a failure of love. In fact, taken as literally as possible, the Ji Yi says that failure to offer the sacrifices with desire is “non-love.” Here, we must keep in mind that bu 不 is strictly a negation, marking the absence of its object in general. This would mean, then, that according to the Ji Yi, the ritual forms do much more than express or manifest the interior devotion of a son, they also affect the internal disposition. If a son fails in the ritual forms he does not merely fail to give expression to his devotion, his failure negates devotion.

But how is this so? It is possible that this insight could require revisiting philosophical anthropology. In general, Christian philosophers in particular would clarify that in agency – rather than passions – the heart-mind as will directs the body toward a good. Are we then suggesting that the bodily failure in ritual acts upon the will and diminishes its power or faculty? Perhaps the Ji Yi involves such a thesis, but I am not convinced it is either present or a necessary move. Rather, I think in volitional terms, the Ji Yi simply means that the will terminates in action. Ritual forms are the completion and perfection of the willed act, just as eating a donut is the completion or perfection of the desire to eat a donut. Even if we think of filial love primarily as a volitional or interior

81 Legge, emphasis mine.
disposition that directs action, it nonetheless intrinsically involves this action. That is, the filial obedience of the ritual forms really is filial love, even though filial love is not merely these acts of filial obedience. We might put it this way: the Ji Yi teaches that filial love is nothing less than obedience to the ritually enacted forms of xiao service in the ancestral sacrifice, even though it is certainly more.

Hence the Ji Yi can scarcely depict a son who would be xiao and yet fail to act in accord with the shape of the ancestral sacrifices as prescribed in li. His execution of the ritual is profoundly marked by an attitude of obedience, inasmuch as he has prepared to undergo the ritual of ancestral sacrifice out of his filial love. The Ji Yi 11 states that the xiao son carries the ritual elements “as if he were carrying precious jade, as if his offering was full to the brim. He is still and collected, as though there was nothing greater, as though he might at any moment drop the ritual elements.”82 This passage makes it clear that this form of ritual sacrifice is not out of timidity or simply a meticulous nature. Rather it is how the “consummate person” (chengren 成人) serves his parents.83

Filial obedience in the execution of the sacrifices enables the xiao son to actualize, perform, or enact his filial love. It allows his love to move from mere affection to true service for his parents. For the xiao son the distinction between obeying the ritual forms and obeying his parents is blurred. He seems to hear them and accept their commands in the rite, but at the same time the rite is the means through which he hears and responds to their commands. Without his filial obedience directed towards the ritual forms of the sacrifice in his execution of the li, the son is incapable of obeying and indeed loving his

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82 Ji Yi, 11.
83 Ibid.
parents. Similarly, without the filial love that leads him to prepare the ritual so that it will be executed, he cannot obey as a xiao son.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analyzed in fair depth the ceremonial rituals of xiao service. Under one auspice, we have gained nothing new: we have seen once again that xiao is the enactment of filial love in the form of filial obedience. Yet we have expanded this vision in two principle ways. First, we have developed a ceremonial and ritual grammar to its furthest ends, showing that obedience to the forms required in li is a constitutive feature of filial obedience. Second, we have seen that these ritual forms are not simply instruments for expressing filial love, but constitute it as well as the concrete enactment or performance of this love.

Since I will draw out more general conclusions from this chapter and its antecedents in Chapter 8, I will now merely add one note on the rites of mourning and ancestral sacrifice that strikes me as terribly important, and determinative going forward. Here, better than anywhere else, we can see the profound gift Confucianism has for Christian theology. It is precisely in the Confucian ability to understand sonship as ritually embodied, and ritual as a filial reality that we find its utter uniqueness as a philosophical school, though of course this uniqueness is not limited to these themes. This grammar of ritual sonship, or put more precisely of xiao as enacted, performed, and indeed perfected through ritual performance is an invaluable contribution to the development of an ecclesially significant Christology. As we progress in this dissertation I hope to shed light on this principle further, though not exhaustively. For now, I simply wish to point out it is of momentous importance and potential for Christian theology.
CHAPTER 8

INCORPORATING XIAO: A CHRISTOLOGICAL SYMPHONY OF EARLY
CONFUCIANISM AND BALTHASAR

1. Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to cultivate the fruit of the preceding studies. I have endeavored to let Balthasar’s theology and early Confucian philosophy to each speak on their own terms – now we will attempt to unite them in a Christological symphony. In this chapter, we will now take the step to incorporate the Confucian xiao into Christian reflection on Christ’s person and work, as guided by Balthasar’s insights. Along the way, we will discover what impact this incorporation holds for interpreting, illuminating, and perhaps adjusting Balthasar’s thought in particular. However, the true goal is to provide an example of how Chinese philosophy can be incorporated into Christian theology at large.

In Chapter 1, I argued that theological incorporation of Chinese philosophy could not anticipate the form of the incorporation at the beginning, nor state conclusively what its fruit must be. Rather, there is an intrinsic dynamism in true incorporation that must be “discovered” rather than directed. Following this insight, the task of this chapter is to draw out contributions out of a heuristic reading of the studies presented in the dissertation. I will not lay out here one systematic argument regarding the role of xiao in
Christian theology, but will rather attempt to maintain the “dynamic” character of incorporation by pointing to various aspects of the fruitfulness of the reading presented in the dissertation. This chapter is less a summary of the orchestral performance, than an attempt to let the performance play out and point out interesting themes along the way.

This means that my findings here can make no claim to be exhaustive. I simply mean to give voice to three general categories of insights I have found in the course of attempting to incorporate the Confucian xiao into Balthasar’s Christological understanding of obedience. First, I wish to show how I think the Confucian xiao amends Balthasar’s Christology. This is not so much because I think Balthasar is wrong in his Christology, but because I think there is a significant feature of his presentation that can create confusion rather than clarity. I see this emendation, then, as an adjustment to Balthasar’s instrument, attuning it with the traditional symphony on Christ by introducing a new grammar of filial love and obedience that indeed “reworks” Balthasar’s insights.

Second, I wish to incorporate Balthasar and Confucianism in a symphonic harmony that intensifies each dialogue partner. By this, I mean on the one hand that allowing the Confucian xiao to “sound with,” or play in harmony with Balthasar in his reading of Christ’s obedience draws our attention to the significant and brilliant aspects of Balthasar’s approach. At the same time, allowing Balthasar’s Christology to harmonize with the Confucian xiao can in turn clarify or open up the deeper truths within the Confucian discourse on xiao. We might say that by focusing on the brass section, we can learn to better appreciate the woodwinds and vice-versa. Third, I explore how reading Balthasar and the Confucian xiao together can expand our knowledge of Christ. Our goal here is to give voice to the experience of hearing the Christ-symphony play once we have
been formed to hear it through studying Balthasar and Confucian philosophy. Put
mystagogically, I wish to demonstrate how these studies lead us deeper into the realities
of the Incarnation and its fruit for the sake of encountering the content of the mystery of
God Incarnate and cultivating a deeper appreciation for the beauty of its symphony.

At the juncture, the reader should note that each level of incorporation I attempt
here is undertaken under the guidelines laid out in the introduction (p. 45 above).
Specifically, my attempt to “attune” Balthasar’s theology with the broader Christian
tradition takes up concerns (2) and (3). The other two incorporative steps draw upon all
of these concerns, but especially emphasize principles (4) and (5).

2. Incorporation as Emendation – Xiao as Grammar of Filial Love and Obedience
for Balthasar’s Christology

As we saw in the introduction to the dissertation, one risk of speaking of Christ’s
obedience is the implication of subordination within God or volitional complexity, i.e.,
more than one will in God. In this section, I mean to argue first and foremost that
Balthasar attempts to overcome such implications in his Christology. However, I wish to
further argue that the category of obedience as he employs it does not well serve the 3rd
principle I identified in the introduction to the dissertation, that guarding against the
improper predication regarding God’s life as volitionally complex requires a clear and
firm distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. I will offer here an account
that the early Confucian concept of Xiao, with its attendant distinction within continuity
between love and obedience, provides a better grammar that allows the question of
volitional complexity to be resolved.
One principal theme in Balthasar’s thought is his assertion that obedience is how the Son loves the Father in the Incarnation and in the Triune life. The latter is the more difficult to posit, and it requires a rather novel development by Balthasar: the notion that the Son actively “consents” to his being generated. This particular thesis has proved controversial in American theology. Bertrand de Margerie, for example, was one of the first to levy the critique that this position appears to predicate two wills in God.1 A major complication of Balthasar’s theology is indeed that he takes the obedience of the Son as so constitutive of his Trinitarian person that he almost always posits as the Son obeying the Father’s will. The problem, as de Margerie and others have noted, is that the divine will is not a predicate of a particular person, but the divine substance and as such is one.

Moreover, there are additional complications with the idea that the Son can “consent” to his being generated. While Balthasar’s intention is to maintain the Son’s loving reception as co-eternal to the Father’s self-giving, I find little clarity provided by his formulation. Even on a logical level, what does it mean to consider an agent who can submit to the fact of his being generated? Importantly, for Balthasar this is not a consenting before the Son’s generation. However, does not this qualification alert us to the complication that the “consent” formulation implies temporal distinction, since “consent” requires a stipulation made in advance? As there is no before or after within God’s life, one must then ask what “consent” means in the Triune context. Ultimately, the language of consent seems to pose two problems: either it suggests a latent subordinationism, or the necessary qualifications to make the concept usable within a Trinitarian context force the term to lose any contact it has with the human experience of consent.

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1 Bertrand de Margerie, “Note on Balthasar’s Trinitarian Theology.”
In order to see why this is necessary, we must ask seek the source of this complicating Balthasar’s thought. I do not think it lies in his intent; even critics like de Margerie notes Balthasar has “a fundamental intention of orthodoxy.” Indeed, Balthasar’s formulation predicates obedience within the Godhead especially in terms of the Son’s consent to being generated in order to clarify that a) that the Son’s Trinitarian life is constituted by his filial love for the Father, and b) this Trinitarian life assumes flesh and expresses itself in the human idiom through the obedience of Jesus Christ unto the hiatus of death. Hence, it is meant to express the harmony of the immanent Trinitarian reality and the economic manifestation in Jesus Christ as the genuine and authentic Gestalt of revelation. Within this intention, the complication comes about due to the constrictions of obedience as a concept.

Whether in German (Gehorsam) or Latin (obaudire) there is an implicit structure in obedience of hearing another person who expresses his or her will in distinction to the obediential agent, who then consents to that will. Along these lines, it seems that to posit obedience as an eternal predicate of the Son’s person is to indeed imply two wills. Michael Waldstein has attempted to argue along the lines of Balthasar on this score, arguing obedience does not require two wills. Instead, he says what is needed is “a distinction of persons and, on the one hand, a command, on the other consent.”

Waldstein then says that these can be said “properly and analogously said” of the Son, drawing upon Aquinas’s commentary on John.

Aside from the question of whether his interpretation of Aquinas’ commentary is accurate, an issue to pose to Waldstein is the economic/immanent distinction. Quite

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2 Ibid., 128.

3 Waldstein, 108.
simply, the Incarnation complicates Christ’s obedience in a way that the immanent life of God does not. Because the Son exists as Jesus in both his divine and human nature, Jesus’s acts of obedience as human perfection can be predicated to the Son as an act of obediential love in the idiom of human nature. However, that does not mean that obedience is a predicate of God’s inner life.

Indeed, Waldstein’s comment that command and consent are necessary raises an important complication with Trinitarian theology. In God, the distinction between the persons is that the Son is the intellectual procession in similitude from the Father. He is the Word, the intellectual signification and reality of the Father. Thus Trinitarian obedience as Waldstein articulates it runs into a categorical complication. Does the Father offer a command apart from the Word to which the Word then consents? Or would Waldstein say the Word is the command and the consenting Person? The fact that Waldstein attempts such a reading in union with St. Thomas is significant since one option would be to interpret the Holy Spirit as the form of command within God’s life. However, in his *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, St. Thomas specifically rejects this position.⁴

Apart from the Trinitarian problem, Waldstein’s approach also raises questions about the conceptual integrity of obedience in his schema. What would it mean for one person to command and another to consent if a distinction of will was not essential to this command? To command another is to express one’s will that is then given consent by the will of the person receiving that command – how can a single rational will obey itself? Thus one wonders what intelligibility there is to a claim that obedience does not require distinction of will but only command and consent, when the concept of command and consent are necessary.

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⁴ *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos Lectura* cap. 1, lect. 2.
consent is precisely the consent of one’s will to the will of another. Certainly, we can say the personal distinctions within God do not contain volitional complexity, and so if there were obedience in God it would be an obedience of distinction of persons without will. However, given our human experience of obedience intrinsically requires such volitional distinction, it would seem that whatever process occurs in God would be so far beyond our capacity to understand it that “obedience” would not even be analogically appropriate to describe it.

With this shape of obedience as a concept in mind, the problem for Balthasar’s approach lies in the way he wishes to identify the Son’s Trinitarian love as obedience. While one can see his point in attempting to make the two co-extensive, the question is whether or not the conceptual structure has this flexibility. Specifically, love has a clear internal movement contained within the soul, even though it does seek expression in the creaturely context. Also, love is much more reflexive, and can genuinely take the self as its proper object. That is, love can communicate the sense that the Triune persons live as a communion of love within the divine substance, as an internal movement. Like St. Augustine’s psychological analogy, love can be a distinction within union, even as it points to the fact of union.

Can obedience achieve this same movement? In one way, there is perhaps an opportunity when considered from the perspective of Chinese philosophy. As we have

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5 ST III q. 20 a. 2. St. Thomas does make the provision that Christ can be subject to and obey himself. However, this can only be in two ways: either by virtue of positing two hypostases or persons in Christ (as Nestorius did) or by virtue of positing two natures in Christ (the orthodox position). Hence, in Christ’s obedience to himself, this is so because the inferior nature (human nature) is subject to the superior nature (divine). Similarly, we can metaphorically say a man obeys himself insomuch as he subjects his sensitive appetite to his rational appetite. Yet we can see in this metaphor the continued problem with obediential language, namely that it implies differentiation in power and quality, as the sensitive operation is inferior to the superior rational operation. Hence, even if we stretch obedience to imply movement within
seen, Confucius once defined *xiao* as *bu wei* 不違, or “not being disobedient,” which I defined in terms of harmony in chapter 6. Would not obedience as “harmonization” draw out the unity in distinction and distinction in unity aspects well? The complication here, however, is thinking terms of *wei* does not rule out the need for separate wills in the obediential structure. This is because the harmonization of *wei* implies differentiation in will: the notion of *bu wei* is to create a balance and harmony (*he 和*) between a son’s desires and his parent’s. Consequently, even here we clearly see that obedience is not only hearing, but also refers to concrete acts striving for harmony, and therein necessarily involves distinction not only of persons, but also of wills.

As the Confucian tradition recognizes, obedience is hardly an internal disposition. Obedience is expressed in concrete acts – it indeed is the completion of the will towards the goods it recognizes as desirable. This shows, then, that obedience involves movement outward rather than within the self either because of a command, or because to enact obedience requires acts in the world. Because of this structure, obedience lacks an essential feature of love that makes it apt for describing the Trinitarian life of utter simplicity and unity, i.e., it is not an “interior” movement. In short, all this suggests that speaking of intra-Trinitarian “obedience” at the least leads into confusion about the relations within God’s life, and at worst, suggest ontological disparity within God.

As we saw in the introduction to this dissertation, one major reason the early Church avoided the language of filial obedience was precisely the issue of clarity. Our study of Balthasar, however, has already shown there is immense fruit to be drawn from such an appeal to filial obedience. The issue I find is that this discussion of intra-

one person (which is not its principle meaning), this only emphasizes once more the relationship of superior and subordination implied in obedience as such.
Trinitarian obedience is the moment where Balthasar’s discussion falls at most risk of obscurity. Yet, I think this is the case because the category of filial obedience at Balthasar’s disposal was not sufficient for the task at hand.

By lending a more nuanced grammar of filial love and obedience as found in Confucianism, it is possible to amend Balthasar’s configuration so as to both better understand his “intention of orthodoxy” and not surrender the insights that are so invaluable (see the section 3 below). Throughout this study, I have argued xiao is the virtue of filial love that is enacted or performed in concrete acts of filial obedience. In the sphere of human agency, I have stressed that this filial love demands expression in filial obedience, but have nonetheless insisted on an important distinction within xiao. I can bury my father as an act of love, but I cannot suppose that filial love is nothing more than the act of burying a deceased parent. Thus xiao is primarily understood as the habitus of filial love and devotion for one’s parent, and the obediential term flows from and extends this love into concrete forms.

Christologically, the great contribution of xiao lies in its ability to distinguish the aspects of love and obedience within filial agency while at the same time bearing witness to their union, i.e., grounding obedience within love. Under Balthasar’s schema, what might be gained by speaking of Christ the Incarnate Son who reveals God’s life to us through his xiao? First and foremost, it allows us to articulate that the Son’s obedience is not in any way predicated on a lower status from the Father as Arius concluded. Nor does this obedience flow out of the pure religious sensibilities of a Jewish man from Nazareth. Rather, this obedience is grounded in and expressive of the Filial Love of the Begotten Son.
At the same time, this filial love is clearly distinct from the acts of obedience themselves. In Trinitarian terms, this means that we have secured space to speak of the Son’s relationship to the Father as one of eternal love that cannot be more narrowly defined as simply obedience – it is a love with an “ever-more” quality. Hence we have no need to posit that the Son reveals himself in obedience because his Triune love is obedience. Rather, we are now free to say that the Son’s eternal filial love is in its Triune reality beyond our conception of love, but this love does fittingly express itself economically in the filial obedience of Jesus Christ.

Incorporating the Confucian xiao would then allow us to say that the eternal Son lives his eternal life of love toward the Father. In the Incarnation, this love takes up the economic missio to become flesh and through the Hypostatic Union, the Son lives a life of obedience grounded in his filial love. The key is that xiao allows us to see that the obedience of the Incarnation is the enactment of filial love in the economic sphere. That is, once the Son becomes Incarnate, his life as love is fittingly expressed as the unique filial obedience he enacts. Of course, at all times, we must keep in mind that this fittingness rests upon the created order as established by God: the intramundane relationship between love and obedience is not a category to which God must conform, but it is itself a connection established by God in the work of creation.

This is an advance on Balthasar’s formulation because the Confucian xiao allows us to avoid any implication that there are two wills in God’s eternal life. Rather, we only need speak of the Son’s Triune life as perfect filial love that is economically enacted as filial obedience. Yet at the same time, we have not surrendered Balthasar’s profound insight that Jesus Christ lives out the Son’s loving obedience to the Father as a mode or
translation of Trinitarian love. In fact, we have strengthened this point precisely because for Confucianism xiao concerns the enactment of filial love in concrete acts. Hence, it is the concrete obedient acts of Jesus in history that constitute the performance of filial love.

Now, one may rebut that we have simply swapped one complication for another. While the filial grammar of xiao does help renegotiate the relationship between the eternal Son’s Triune love and economic obedience, it also raises problems by virtue of the fact that I have defined xiao as involving filial obedience as the enactment or perfection of filial love. This creates two distinct difficulties. On the one hand, this can imply that within God’s own life, the love of the Son is either not enacted or imperfect, which contravenes the doctrine of God’s simplicity as pure act. In turn, this implies that the Incarnation is necessary to God’s perfection, or more generally, that the concrete is necessary to the divine self-actualization.6

According to sacred tradition, neither position can be held appropriately, but the question is whether these challenges are essential to xiao or if they reflect a more basic complication. I contend these challenges are extant because of the fundamental limits of analogies rather than special difficulties of the Confucian xiao. The Confucian xiao is not formulated in terms of divine perfection, but as a reflection on the human person and human relationships. As such, it is founded on the anthropological fact of concrete existence in time and corporeality. Since human beings are both material and immaterial, to possess filial love as a human being truly does require filial obedience for perfection and enactment. This is because I am not simply one with my parent – our concrete,

6 As we saw in the introduction, this is precisely the problem with the authoritarian model of the Trinity by Wayne Grudem.
distinct lives as human beings mean our experience of love requires concrete forms of enactment and performance to be love.

Thus, the Confucian xiao requires concrete forms of filial obedience because filial love occurs in a concrete world. My parents do have physical needs, and I can bring them honor or shame by choosing to go to this concrete place or travel in a concrete way. Additionally, my parents will die, and I will recognize their loss and keep their memory. The various forms of xiao at their foundation point to the various concrete situations that human sonship entails, and informs us on how filial love moves towards its enactment in and through the concrete experiences and relationships that constitute human life.

But the concrete materiality of human life is not found in God. God does not face concrete situations in which He is compelled to enact himself. Rather, in God’s inner life, his life of love is a life of enacted and perfected love. There is then, no need to think that the Son’s love is un-enacted in the Trinity, for it is enacted love in keeping with the perfections and immateriality of the divine substance. Moreover, because the divine substance is distinct from the concrete, it does not require the concrete in order to fulfill itself or perfect itself.

Thus undergirding the Christological incorporation of xiao must remain a key element of Balthasar’s approach: God’s acts toward the world are a free gift of love, and not out of any necessity for the world. Put Christologically, the concrete acts of filial obedience that occur in the Incarnation become necessary only because God elects out of free love to enter the concrete space of created history. Upon such an entrance, the Son enters the concrete world of decision, where the exercise of the human volitional faculties involves a separation between choosing and doing the good. In terms of the Confucian
*xiao*, we might articulate this by saying the Son’s eternal life in the Trinity expresses perfect filial devotion in love alone because it does not occur within a space and time where love is performed through ritual, service, and concern for one’s parent. However, through the Incarnation, God assumes a concrete existence in which ritual, service, and concern become intrinsic to the enactment of love through obedience.

Hence the Confucian *xiao* clarifies Balthasar’s central Christological insight. For Balthasar, all importance lies on the fact that the Son’s obedience *is* the manifestation of Triune love in the world. Christ’s obedience is the Son’s love of the Father expressed in the idiom of the Incarnation. Because *xiao* presents obedience as the way love is performed or enacted in concrete forms, it helps us see that Jesus’ obedience is only “necessary” inasmuch as it is part of the natural, Incarnate form of the Son’s eternal love. Not only does the incorporation of the Confucian *xiao* avoid the complications surrounding the language of Balthasar that suggests (though not confesses) two wills in God, but also we intensify his insight regarding the essential union of the Son’s eternal love and the love-manifesting obedience in Christ.

3. *Incorporation as Symphonic Harmonization: Playing Balthasar and Confucianism Together*

Beyond amending Balthasar’s Christology, *xiao* can also intensify Balthasar’s insights. In the same movement, however, Balthasar’s Christological approach clarifies and intensifies themes in the Confucian *xiao*. We might say that both open up and illuminate the other in a clarifying transposition: in hearing them play together, we can hear anew these two distinct instruments and discover qualities overlooked in a solo performance. A good point of departure that clarifies my perspective here is that, in the
words of *Nostra Aetate*, Christ is “that Truth which enlightens all men.” As such, doctrines like *xiao*, which “reflect a ray of that Truth,” are fulfilled and perfected by Christ.⁷ At the same, the Christian understanding of the radiance of illumination given by the Truth is intensified.

Balthasar seems to be in agreement on this score. Markus Enders has argued that Balthasar not only understood the Old Testament traditions as necessary prolegomena to Christ, but also Greek pagan philosophy as a preparation for revelation.⁸ While Enders defines this is in terms of the pre-Christian perception of beauty as preparation for the perception of divine revelation, there seems to be also a Christological key to this in Balthasar’s thought. In *GL 4*, for example, Balthasar presents Socrates almost as a type that is fulfilled in Christ.⁹ If Balthasar had known Confucian philosophy, and deeply engaged it, I am confident he would have seen a similar case with *xiao*.

So, I argue that the divinely revealed form of Christ fulfills and perfects the form of *xiao*. Consequently, this relationship between Christ and *xiao* simultaneously clarifies the Confucian concept in its perfections intensifies the insights Balthasar brings in his Christology. The first intensification lies in the complete and utter harmonization of Christ’s *xiao* that does not persist in typical *xiao*. As we have seen, the Confucian exemplar for *xiao* is Shun, precisely because he persists in his *xiao* despite having parents who seem to be unworthy of such devotion. The reason for Shun’s exemplarity is that his situation contains in type the consistent obstacle within *xiao*, that parents are not

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⁷ *NA*, §2.


⁹ *GL 4*, 166-215.
necessarily and are often not good moral agents. Consequently, there is in Confucianism
a profound tension between being xiao and pursing the Good on a larger scale. Many
times, perhaps often, parents can create obstacles to doing the good, even while being
xiao towards them is part of the good (dao or tiandao).

According to Confucianism, it is impossible for someone to be entirely good by
his or herself. In general, the Analects emphasizes that moral excellence can only be
cultivated in society, hence the hermetic life is not fitting for the gentleman. Doing the
good personally requires that the community around me enable me to pursue the good –
if I live in an immoral community, the need to act virtuously and the virtue of good
citizenship will collide. Additionally, the concealment cases (Analects 13.18, Mencius
5A:3) show that the son cannot resolve the tension of an immoral parent by simply doing
what is right. If my father commands me to murder his rivals, I have to decide which
course is best, to obey or not kill. If my father commanded me to love others, I would not
face such a stark decision.

Christ perfects and fulfills the perfect harmonization of xiao precisely because he
is the Son of God Incarnate. The xiao of Jesus is aimed first and foremost toward the
Father. There is no distance or difference between the Father and Goodness, for God is
goodness itself. For the Incarnate Son, to have xiao for the Father is to pursue the Good.
At no point does his xiao face any tension forcing him to choose whether to obey the
Father or obey the good – he does both in the exact same movement. With Balthasar’s
Christology in particular, his theme of a priori obedience intensifies this point. For Christ,
the Father and goodness are so coextensive that he does not even need to know the
specific data of his mission. Jesus does not have to pause and ask himself whether his mission aligns with *tiandao*; he knows this from the outset, and can simply obey.

Because of his life as Incarnate Word, Jesus alone can reveal the perfections of the Father-Son relationship that early Confucianism seeks to establish in *xiao*. Put another way, only Jesus can be genuinely *xiao* in every aspect of his life without adopting a naïve hopefulness about his parent’s goodness. Hence Jesus possesses the only truly perfect form of *xiao* not only because of his own perfections as eternal Son, but also because of the perfection of the eternal Father. Jesus thus clarifies *xiao* in two ways. First, his life shows us that filial love and obedience truly are coextensive ultimately – there is no inherent disagreement between love and obedience, only as it exists in a sinful world. Secondly, it shows that the Confucian insistence on *xiao* need not be contrived as wishful thinking or establishing human relations based on an ideal state (good parents, good children). Rather, it is a testimony to the perfection of the Father-Son relation. That Jesus Christ reveals this perfection in a way far exceeding what early Confucians imagined is obvious. However, Jesus does show that the “hope” of the Confucian teaching of *xiao* is real and well founded.

A second way in which Jesus harmonizes with *xiao* is that he shows how *xiao* concerns the relationship with God as well as with one’s parents. As we saw, the reason *xiao* is intrinsic to human life for early Confucians is because they recognized that parents communicate existence to children: our parents are our source of life. Ultimately, Confucianism was unable to connect this conception with its understanding of *Tian* or *Dao* as a divine force, i.e. it could not comprehend the degree to which *xiao* points toward the divine. This is quite simply because, as with Plato and Aristotle, early
Confucians had no way to consider Tian as a personal substance, and only identified Tian as a divine force that acts in the world and in harmony with the material order. Precisely because it took the parent so seriously as a source of life-giving power in concrete relationships, early Confucianism was unable to clearly articulate how a divine force could “create” the world, though they recognized the world was caused.\(^{10}\)

Christianity would agree on this score, and affirm that it is only in Christ and the work of divine self-revelation that we know God is “personal,” ultimately as three hypostases in one ousia. Only through God’s self-revelation culminating in Christ can we find that the creative agency of our earthly parents – which is, according to natural law, the fruit of the freely given, intentional act of love between husband and wife – is illustrative of the creative agency of God,\(^{11}\) who does not create out of necessity but as a free and intentional act of love. Only through revelation do we know that God’s causing the world is an expression of his paternal love for the world, and hence we see God’s paternity and majesty are one.

Several scholars of Confucian philosophy have attempted to argue that one key difference between Christianity and Confucianism is that the former argues God is the object of true devotion, whereas the latter says it is one’s parent.\(^{12}\) But this is false dichotomy built on an oversimplification, at least from the perspective of Christianity. Christ shows us that xiao – or at the very least, his xiao – is simultaneously directed at one’s parent and to God. This because for Jesus, the creative agency of the father and the

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\(^{10}\) The entire structure of yin-yang cosmology is one of causation, acknowledging the movement from non-being to being is caused.

\(^{11}\) See Evangelium Vitae, 43; Gratissimam sane.

divine agency are one in the Father, mutatis mutandis. Jesus even invites Christians into this conception of God within parental idiom when he instructs us to pray “Pater noster.”

Moreover, we have seen that Balthasar emphasizes how Jesus’ relationship to Mary is involved in his relationship to the Father. His obedience to Mary, which is both to her (and St. Joseph) and to the covenant, is a constitutive feature of his Sonship. This is because, contra Nestorius, the Son takes up human nature in his person and as such assumes Mary as his mother. Thus his xiao towards Mary really is a function of his xiao to and within God’s life.

Of course, this link between divine Sonship and obedience to Mary is possible because of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, whereby Mary is protected from the state of original sin. Yet this fact this does not diminish but rather perfects the xiao relationship between Jesus and the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. The Virgin’s fiat is perfect openness to God’s will through the proleptic merit of Christ, and hence there is no conflict in his obeying her and his obeying the eternal Father. Likewise, St. Joseph is so devoted to the mission of adopted fatherhood in openness to God’s will that Christ can be obedient to him in his being obedient to the Father. Therefore in Christ, there exists the perfect concordance (Übereinstimmung) between xiao towards one’s parents and xiao towards God. Moreover, they are not clearly distinguishable movements – the former takes place within the latter.

Through Christ, we see that the xiao schema of early Confucianism implicitly points toward an account of how to relate with the divine. Christ manifests, demonstrates, and enables us to understand the divine not as abstract theos or Tian, but as the Triune God who reveals himself in the love that sends the Son to the cross pro nobis. Without
this structure, the metaphysical relevance of xiao could only be groped toward in texts like the Yangzi Fayan, Chunqiu Fanlù, and Liji. Yet this groping nevertheless touches upon aspects of a mystery that lay hidden and waiting in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

A third and final aspect of xiao that is harmonized in Christ is the relationship between xiao and ren 仁. Liu Qingping has argued vigorously that the Confucian approach to ethics is based on a “consanguinism” that subverts our social responsibilities towards others. In a way, Liu is a modern reiteration of the classic Mohist critique of Confucianism: the emphasis ought to first lie on being ren, or on the social responsibilities we have toward one another, and then circle back to the particularity of the family. The Confucian position is that the particularity of the family is the foundation of our relationships towards others – xiao is the root (ben 本) of ren. Scholars have attempted to explain this in several ways. One of the most popular is to assert a “diffusion” theory of xiao, arguing Confucians see xiao as affection we have for our parents that is so strong it then becomes extended to others outside the family outward like ripples on the water radiating from the original impact of a stone.13 Another method growing in popularity is to attempt to ground the Confucian emphasis on the particularity of the family within the evolutionary development of human relationships.14

I think what early Confucians really mean by saying xiao is the root of ren is simply that unless we love our parents – the most natural form of love and most obvious relationship requiring love and devotion – how can we hope to understand what it means to care for others? As such, a better model for thinking of xiao’s relation to ren is P.J.

13 See Schwarz, 259 for a paradigmatic version.

14 See e.g., Yong Li, “Evolution, Care and Partiality.”
Ivanhoe’s reading of Mencius. He claims Mencius means that moral cultivation is the “extension” or growth of the “sprouts” (duan 端) of morality; on this model, so too is xiao the “sprouts” that are extended into ren. It is thus not really that xiao is powerful and radiates outward, but that xiao is the foundational cultivation of love that enables and makes possible the cultivation of care and concern for others. The particularity of the family is not “more important” than social concern, but it is what makes this kind of wider concern intelligible.

Within this argument, I contend that Jesus Christ reveals the perfect meaning of xiao as the root of ren. Balthasar’s emphasis throughout his corpus is that the pro nobis of Christ’s cross is predicated on the fact of intra-divine love. Hence in Christ, his love for the Father grounds and involves intrinsically his love for the world. This does not mean that God does not thus really love the world, or that the world is only a means for God to express his life as love. Rather, it means that God’s life as perfect love establishes and grounds whatever it means to say with the Fourth Gospel that “enim Deus dilexit mundum” (Jn 3:16).

Within Jesus, his xiao really is the root of his ren. Only in the Son’s filial love for the Father do we find the root and ground of his love for us. Moreover, only in Jesus does the particularity of xiao result in the most true form of social care and concern for others, going so far as to actually become the root (ben) of all social relations within his body. Hence the Christian ren – care and concern for others in social ministry, in almsgiving,

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15 See Ivanhoe, “Confucian Self Cultivation and Mengzi’s Notion of Extension.”
and in defending the downtrodden – truly is rooted in the particularity of the divine love shared between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{16}

Now this is not to say that the Confucian conception of the relationship between \textit{xiao} and \textit{ren} is unintelligible on its own, or is misguided outside of its fulfillment in Christ – quite the opposite. However, I think it is profoundly true that the Confucian insight into the link between \textit{xiao} and \textit{ren} is confirmed, intensified, and perfected in the Incarnation. Just as with the link between \textit{xiao} and the good and the relationship between divine and parental agency, Christ confirms and clarifies the Confucian \textit{xiao} in the same movement by which he expands beyond the possible contours of the concept from the view of ancient China. But this is neither a surprise nor a detriment. It is not based on the weakness of Confucianism as human wisdom, but based on the power of God to reveal himself in a way that completes intramundane truth and reveals how it participates in Him.

A final note concerns Balthasar’s conception of the Incarnation itself as a filial act. For Balthasar, this means two chief things. First, that the fact of the Hypostatic Union is a concrete economic act of the Son’s obedience. Second, that as the Son lives out the human nature he has united to himself, his life as Son finds ever-deepening enactment in the concrete economic sphere. Together these show that the Son economically enacts his Sonship in the union of the divine and human natures.

With regard to the first insight, the Confucian \textit{xiao} intensifies this because underlying the Confucian \textit{xiao} is the conviction that sonship is performed – the son must “son.” Filiality is not merely a fact of one’s relation to particular parents, but it is lived out and expressed in concrete acts. Moreover, especially through the category of indirect

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. \textit{Gaudium et spes}, §24.
care, this means that all concrete acts are either imbued with xiao or not – there are no acts which are “neutral” in terms of enacting xiao. Because the Incarnation rests on the Trinitarian decision of God, the Son’s assumption of flesh at the moment that Mary is overcome by the Holy Spirit is the Son’s filial love and obedience. That is, the fact of the Incarnation represents the initial moment at which Jesus’ sonship truly is performed, literally enacted in the enfleshment of the Logos.

With regard to the second insight, there are two aspects of the Confucian xiao that intensify Balthasar’s Christology. The more general aspect is that Confucianism understands that xiao is expressed over an entire lifetime. Although the context of how xiao is enacted changes as the child’s life progresses, it is still xiao that is enacted through care to living parents, mourning, and ancestral sacrifices. More particularly, within indirect care, the reason sonship imbues all acts is because the xiao child points his existence toward his parents.

Balthasar, more than any other theologian of whom I am aware, emphasizes in his missional Christology that Jesus understands his sonship as expressive of his very existence. Thus Jesus sees his eating, sleeping, and working all within the context of his “mission” or his identification as Son. The Confucian xiao helps intensify this point by showing this feature of Jesus’ life is not abnormal, but a condition of existence. The fact that Jesus is his mission is a direct result of the fact that he truly is the Incarnate Son of God. As Jesus progresses in his human life, each moment really does “deepen” the enactment of his sonship. That is, each moment of Jesus’ life that expresses his filial love and obedience adds to the perfection of his enacted filial love through his human nature.
Because each of these moments represents an opportunity be not *xiao*, the fact that he is *xiao* at every single moment confirms, intensifies, and deepens his Sonship. Hence, in no way does Jesus become more “the Son.” Rather, each moment of enacted filial love turns him back to the center of his Filial existence, and in this sense the thoroughness of the Hypostatic Union – i.e., the fact that Jesus’ human nature is that which is truly united to the eternal Son – becomes ever more apparent. Or, we might say this thoroughness proves itself so that the human faculties of Jesus become clearly expressive of his union with the eternal Son.

Importantly, Balthasar does not in any way think the human nature is commingled with the divine, but rather that the human nature of Jesus is united hypostatically to the person of the Son. Consequently, Jesus’ concrete existence by which he lives out human nature is not merely living out a human life in perfection, though it is this. Jesus’ concrete existence as human is also expressive of this union in the person of the Son, and indeed is the Son’s being human. Thus his human life is in every single respect an expression of his *xiao* as eternal Son, and as such constitutes a perpetually building and deepening testimony to the fact of the Incarnation.

3. *Incorporation as Mystagogical Expansion*

We now enter into the form of incorporation that I believe is the truest sense of the concept, wherein we read Balthasar and the Confucian *xiao* in concert in order to enter into the mysteries of Christ. Of course, it is impossible to go through the proceeding tasks without this mystagogical expansion in some degree. However, I now move to somewhat more speculative aspects. Unlike the preceding sections, we will not necessarily deal here with precisely what Balthasar develops in his Christology, or the
Confucian *xiao* presented in the tradition, but rather we will take directions that are a working out of the forms provided. Yet it should be stated clearly my goal here is not to expand Balthasar’s Christology as such, but to enable a genuine entrance into the mystery of Christ as proclaimed in the Church. Though I see no conflict in these tasks, I wish to simply emphasize my main concern is not “perfecting” Balthasar’s “system;” rather I endeavor to follow his guidance toward the author and perfecter our faith, and contemplate His life and work.

3.1. *Ritual Aspects of Christ’s Filial Love and Obedience*

One major contribution of Balthasar’s Christology is to clearly show how the sacrificial significance of the cross occurs within the movement of the Son’s expression of his filial love and obedience. Within this movement, Balthasar relies heavily upon the Cross as both vicarious representation (*Stellvertretung*) of the sinner and as act of filial love and obedience. Holy Saturday, since it is the nadir and greatest testimony to Christ’s obedience in undertaking solidarity with the sinner, becomes an extension and point of union between these two aspects. Finally the Resurrection is the glorification of the Son, as the defeat of death and sin, as well as the “verification” of the Son’s filial love and obedience by the Father.

Taking these insights as a point of departure, I will present a very brief sketch of what the Confucian *xiao* may add to this vision of the Cross. At the center of this sketch is the insight mentioned at the end of chapter 7, that the Confucian conception of *xiao* as ritually structured seems profoundly helpful for Christian theology. Because I think this insight is significant enough to require several essays or a book to explore it well, I can only here give the briefest sense of what I think is involved.
As we have seen throughout the dissertation, early Confucians saw that \textit{xiao} has an intrinsic ritual component. It is not merely that sons perform rituals, but that rituals are the way sonship is enacted. Both in the mundane every day tasks and in the great ceremonies of life, the \textit{xiao} son draws upon \textit{li} to order and express his filial love. It is profound that in Christ, we find a similar structure: his life as the eternal Son united with human nature fittingly expresses itself in the performance and establishment of rituals.

This link between \textit{xiao} and \textit{li} is helpful for understanding the circumincision not only between Christ’s Sonship and the Cross, but within multifarious ritual aspects of his life. For example, in the Synoptics, Jesus heals a leper and then commands him to undergo the purification rites in the temple (cf. Matthew 8:4). In light of the Confucian \textit{xiao}, we see that Christ is not simply fulfilling external regulations the Jewish tradition which he will soon surpass, but rather is \textit{affirming} the ritual life of Israel. This is because as Son, his goal is not to extirpate the ritual cultus, but to imbue it with his filial love and obedience. When he sends the leper to the temple, he is doing so out of his filial love for God that sees obedience to the Hebrew cultus as an essential expression of this love.

Another profound example is the multiplication miracle, in which Jesus takes up a ritual form by looking to heaven, blessing the bread and fish, and then it is multiplied.\footnote{During the Mass, this ritual movement is maintained by the priest’s elevation of the Host and Cup, an act done \textit{in persona Christi} it should be noted.} Now, it is obvious from a Christian perspective that Jesus does not simply tap into the correct formula for multiplying food. It is also obvious that the power of God is such that this form of miracle is strictly unnecessary – such miracles reflect not only God’s power, but the divine choice to display Himself in these ways. Thus, out of free choice, Jesus the Incarnate Son takes up a ritual form in his miracles. The reason behind this seems to lie in
the fact that Jesus finds the ritual form of miracles best reflects and testifies to the authority by which he performs them.

This point is compelling, for in Mark, the Pharisees’ assumption about Jesus’ authority – that he is from Beelzebub\(^\text{18}\) – stands in stark contrast to the demonic testimony about Jesus. At every turn the demons recognize Jesus’ authority as “the Son of God.” Precisely because the authority of Jesus is a “coming out of his very substance” (Mk 1:22: εξουσιαν) his authority is tied to his being the Son of God. Yet Christ enacts this authority not as conquering hero or forceful presence, but in the ritual passing of all glory to the Father. He does not command the people to look at him – the Son looks to heaven.

Of course, the event that fulfills and gives meaning to all these other acts lies between Holy Thursday and Good Friday. In the foundation of the Eucharist – the Church’s supreme ritual - Jesus assumes the place of the paschal lamb. At the Last Supper, Jesus thus re-establishes in himself the Passover story, reconciling its tragic characteristics. Just as in Exodus 11 the first-born will die in order to set the people free. But in Jesus the “first-born of all creation” (Col. 1:15) is also the lamb slain “at the foundation of the world” (1 Pet 1:19-20), whose blood will cover the doors posts of God’s people. The first-born will enter into death on behalf of the many, and his blood will protect them from death. Hence, the ritual enactment of the Passover and the institution of the Lord’s Supper are both sacrificial and filial moments. The ritual union Christ makes between the lamb of liberation and his own defeat of sin calls upon his filial life for its completion.

\(^{18}\) Mark 3:21.
Above all, though, the Crucifixion is the perfect entailment of Christ’s ritual sonship. Throughout the New Testament, particularly in Hebrews, it is recognized that Christ completes and fulfills the typology of the Old Testament priesthood, though in a modified fashion (cf. Heb. 5:5-6). This is primarily located at the Cross, since there Jesus works as priest to offer the perfect lamb (while being the perfect lamb) that expiates for our sins. An additional move should be made to connect the priestly office of Christ with the drama of Genesis 22. When Abraham takes Isaac up the mountain, he lays his only son (from Sara) on the sacrificial table. Abraham prepares to enact the ritual sacrifice out of his creaturely obedience to God, but then God stays his hand and Abraham sees a lamb in a covey of thorns wrapped about its head. We then find that Abraham sacrifices the lamb “on behalf of his son” (Gen. 22:13).

It is quite obvious under an allegorical interpretation that Genesis 22 points toward the vicarious atonement of Christ. But it also points toward the filial character of this sacrifice. Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? In light of Christ, it is clear that this was to show that the lamb of sacrifice will be united with the son; or rather, the Lamb will be taken into and perfected by the Only Begotten Son who will come to redeem the world. Yet also, Genesis 22 shows us proleptically that the manner of Christ’s redemption as Son is driven toward the lamb. God does not ask Abraham for a human sacrifice; he asks for Abraham’s son so that he may show to us that his own Son will climb the mount of Calvary. Yet the eternal Son will also be the Lamb with the crown of thorns who will perfect Abraham’s sacrificial obedience and Isaac’s filial obedience in conjoining them with divine mercy. Christ’s Sonship is thus the completion of

19 See ST III q. 22 art. 3.
Abraham’s sacrifice, precisely in his willingness to take up the cup and be the Lamb for us in loving, ritualized obedience to the Father.

One event in particular that shows this expression of Sonship in the sacrifice of the cross is with the “cry of dereliction” wherein Jesus quotes from Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” We have seen that for Balthasar, this is an expression of a genuine state of abandonment, of God’s “hiddenness” (absconditus Deus) on the Cross. My interpretation of this passage has a different emphasis, and I do not necessarily think it is essential to read Christ’s experience on the Cross in terms of abandonment as such. First and foremost, in this exclamation we find a similar movement as when Jesus “looks to heaven” in the performance of his miracles and in the institution of the Eucharist. In the Confucian ancestral sacrifice we saw that sacrificing meant “turning towards” (xiang 邂) and so too Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross manifests itself in a “turning towards” the Father. He does not turn to the people as if they are the recipients of the sacrifice, but towards the Father. Hence, the “cry of dereliction” along with the commendation of the Spirit to the Father points out the sacrifice of the Cross is filially directed.

Moreover, we must call to mind the content of Psalm 22. After the initial cry of abandonment, the Psalm progresses toward a praise of God’s faithfulness: “For it was you who drew me out of the womb, my hope from the breast of my mother. In your protection was I born; since I left my mother’s womb, you are my God” (Ps 22:10-11). The denouement of the Psalm is praise of God’s majesty, exhorting the adoration of God who will rescue from the enemies that surround the supplicant. Because of this faithfulness the Psalmist proclaims, “and my soul shall live among him, and my offspring
(semen meum) shall serve him. The Lord will be proclaimed through to future generations, and they will announce the story of his justice to the people who will be born, telling them what the Lord has done” (Ps 22:31-32).

Thus the “cry of dereliction” points toward a testimony to God’s faithfulness as the one who protects the speaker from the time of birth to the time of trial. In Jesus, the filial features of this account become clear. For him, that God “drew him from the womb” is not a metaphor or circumlocution, but a fact established in the Visitation. The Holy Spirit’s movement upon Mary to conceive the child Jesus is both the birth of God and the birthing by God. This again points toward the fact that it is the Son, the second person, who is drawn out, and hence it is as Son that Jesus understands his reception of God’s faithfulness. Moreover, he cites this Psalm, which promises that future generations will receive the story of God’s justice. In Confucian terms, Jesus alludes to the greatest filial act: producing later generations (you hou 有後) that can carry on the lineage of the family. 20 That Jesus enacts this filial devotion in the founding of the Church and through his Mother’s participation in him – “Woman, behold your son…Behold your mother” (Jn 19:26-27) shows simply the supra-sexual nature of this lineage, as well as its foundation in the form of the Cross.

Thus the ritual of the Cross whereby Jesus performs the priestly act of expiating for sins is also a xiao act. This ritual “for us” is also at the same time a perfect expression of the Son’s filial love. Whenever the Church speaks of the ritual sacraments drawing upon the power of the Cross, this is not simply a formal fact. It is not just that the ritual communicates particular effects, but it also carries out the perfection of filial love and

20 Cf. Pius XII, Ingruentium Malorum, §17.
obedience in every celebration. This makes profoundly clear why it is true that the Eucharist can not only effect greater union with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, but also heal venial sin and protect against mortal sin. In the Eucharist, we draw near not simply to one supreme ritual, but a ritual imbued and communicative of Christ’s filial love and obedience. To receive this sacrifice under the species of bread and wine is to thus take in Christ’s filial existence, and hence to be made more deeply into “sons of God.”

To truly open up this mystery will remain for a later work. This is principally because developing it would require a deep reading of Christ’s office as priest and a more forceful account of the Confucian conception of \( li \) 禮. Yet we see enough here to recognize that the hermeneutic of the Confucian \( xiao \) alerts us to the presence of a union between Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and his life as Son.

3.2. Participating in Christ’s Filial Obedience: Natural and Participated Xiao

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated that Balthasar’s Christology points to Christ’s unique form of obedience as the “inimitable model” of Christian life – discipleship is not mimicking Christ, but participating in his life of filial love and obedience. The Confucian \( xiao \) has resources that open this up further, and that can fruitfully develop a grammar of how to better understand what Christian participation in Christ’s obedience is. Before showing how this is the case, I should note that the model I sketch here would need a further distinction in the various states of participation, such as those presented by Balthasar in *The Christian State of Life*. It is impossible that participation in Christ’s filial obedience is dialectically opposed to the creaturely or covenantal forms of obedience, as I strove to show in Chapter 3. Rather, Christian life is the participation of the creaturely genus of obedience within Christ’s; the creature’s obedience is welcomed into Christ’s
life of filial love and obedience. The question is whether there are ways to describe this relationship that increase our perception of the mystery. More particularly, are there any resources we can draw upon to strengthen and re-open aspects of this mystery that reverberate upon traditional Christian themes and concepts?

The Confucian xiao seems to me helpful on both counts. This is in one way due to the ancestral structure implicit in xiao. Because xiao is so utterly comprehensive for the son, it extends to his entire life and includes his actions towards his own children. Forming his children to be xiao is an important part of being a xiao father, for two reasons. First because a father ought to instill moral excellence in his children and this includes xiao. Second, because a father who is himself xiao will recognize that his children also must pay the debt of honor and love to the ancestors who preceeded them. In only a limited sense does a father who is xiao encourage filiality in his children so that this devotion is aimed at him. Rather, his own xiao informs him that he must encourage his children to be xiao as an act of service towards his own parents and the ancestral lineage.

Consequently, if a son who is xiao becomes a father and encourages his children to be xiao, this does not begin a wholly new xiao relationship, but is a continuation of the father’s xiao and truly is grounded in it. Obviously, this cannot be taken so as to prevent the child’s xiao from being a genuine virtue of his or her own self-cultivation. After all, the xiao child is an agent who enacts his or her filial love, and this enactment as well as the agency involved is distinct from the parent’s. Yet at the same time, a xiao child of a xiao parent does not understand the content of xiao in isolation from his or her parent. Precisely because the xiao parent models for the child the dao in regard to family
relations (if not more generally), the child’s xiao involves following his or her parent’s form of life.

In this sense, the xiao child of a xiao parent participates in the parent’s xiao. Because the content and shape of xiao is grounded in the way of life of the parent (and presumably, the ancestral lineage of xiao preceding the parent), the child’s self-cultivation of filial devotion is not a mere “modeling” of his or her parents. Rather, the child receives xiao from his or her parents, and can only be xiao within this reception. This then opens essential insight into how Christian obedience is an enacted participation, rather than just essential participation in Christ.21

Additionally, there is a profound capacity for the Confucian xiao to demonstrate the logic of participated obedience within the nuptial imagery used to describe Christ’s relationship with the Church. In spite of arguments by those like Fergus Kerr, OP who dislike the turn to nuptial language since the pontificate of Pope St. John Paul II,22 this terminology has a rich place in Catholic theology, though certainly not in isolation. To consider the Church as the prepared Bride of Christ powerfully underscores the electing and uniting love of God that grounds the possibility of the Church.

How is it that Confucianism can add to this conversation? One of the detriments of the Confucian xiao is that it seems on its face intrinsically sexist or at least biased as it speaks of xiao as something practiced by sons. Yet this is not simply because early Confucian was misogynistic; indeed, many of Confucius’ teachings are incompatible

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21 That is, Christian life is not like a spiritual ontology of participation, but it is truly acting out a form of life that participates in Christ as the archetype.

22 See Kerr, Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians.
with sexism. Rather, this structure is based on the social norms in place long before Confucius that governed the practices of marriage and child rearing. Early Chinese society understood the union of marriage to result in the wife’s entrance into the husband’s family, in such a way that the wife’s relation to her own natural family was basically nullified. Partially, this is because the early Chinese family was a foundation for livelihood and security. Especially in the case of an eldest son, the wife would typically live in the home of her in-laws with her husband, and her children were understood as coming from her husband’s ancestral lineage.

In terms of xiao, this structure creates both problems and possibilities. Is xiao merely a masculine virtue, and if so what is its parallel concept in women? If there is no xiao for women, how do early Confucians include daughters are part of the virtuous service to parents – are they merely left as unrefined, intractable children who can neither be corrected or formed in moral excellence? Texts like the Biographies of Women (Lie Nü Zhuan 列女傳) clearly apply xiao to women, however as both Sor-hoon Tan and Keith N. Knapp point out, early Confucians did not typically reflect on the significance of being able to call a woman xiao.

Lisa Raphals has offered a clear advance when she argues for a distinction in xiao between natural and nurtured forms. The background for this is classical debate over

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23 Sandra A. Wawrytko, “Kongzi as a Feminist: Confucian Self-Cultivation in a Contemporary Context,” *JCP* 27 no 2 (June 2000): 171-86. Wawrytko argues that the Confucian ideal of the junzi (“son” of the nobleman) is applicable to women as well. Despite living in a patriarchal society, she argues that sexism is incompatible with Confucius’ teachings, and that the Confucian concept of meritocracy as political ideal allows for a challenge to the strict patriarchy in much of the ancient world.

24 As with all ancient cultures, there is an inevitable encounter with what we now know would consider sexism in ancient China, although it is also much more complex – again, as with all ancient cultures – than such labels can express.

whether xiao is best understood as an emotion or a virtue. Raphals masterfully chooses both, noting (as we have in this dissertation) that for the son, the exercise of filial virtue is based on a natural emotional foundation towards his particular parents that his wife will not have. Thus, for a wife to have xiao for her in-laws is not based on her natural feelings of daughterly love for them. She can, of course, recognize the need to honor parents in general and have a clear knowledge that all life comes from parents, and her children’s lives are indebted to her in-laws (as well as her own parents), but this is without the “natural” foundation. While the wife would possess natural xiao for her own parents, her xiao for her in-laws must be nurtured.26

From this it is important to point out that the wife is not only encouraged in early Confucianism to cultivate a sense of xiao, but it seems also that she participates in (and perfects) her husband’s xiao.27 Without his wife, the son cannot properly carry out the ritual forms associated with ancestral sacrifice in particular. Without her participation, the son’s xiao is lessened. This is also true in more quotidian matters, where the wife is included in exhortations to obedience and giving nourishment to parents.

Hence, on the negative side, the wife’s xiao is not hers alone, but is dependent upon her son’s devotion to his parents. Yet at the same time, her participation in xiao is still a constitutive part of xiao perfection. At times, it almost seems as though the husband and wife become mutually transformed agents of xiao, acting out the same filial devotion that is nonetheless grounded on the natural relations between the husband and his parents. The upshot is that the xiao of the husband and wife allows us a grammar for a


27 See Liji, Nei ze, 16-17.
type of filial devotion that has distinct foundation from the “natural” form of one agent and yet a true enactment of this natural form of devotion. That this grammar is ensconced in nuptial imagery is most propitious for Christian theology.

The trouble, however, lies in transporting too many implications about gender role and perfections in the conversation, so let us make some clarification. I mean to argue there that the model of husband and wife and how each is xiao according to early Confucianism has in this regard a helpful analog for the Church’s understanding of itself as bride of Christ. This does not mean the Church needs to valorize the type of patriarchal structure of the early Chinese family, or that the use of this model implies an acceptance of the somewhat troubling aspects of the treatment of women in Confucian history.28 Rather, I simply mean that this relationship has an aspect that sheds light on the beauty of revelation, though it occurs within a very imperfect social order (as is the universal case) and expression.

Furthermore, I am here emphasizing a very particular aspect of xiao as it had to be practiced by a married woman in the early Confucian context – the division between “natural” and “participated” xiao is not meant to imply the female xiao in marriage is of lesser quality than the male as such, or that women have no ability to be devoted daughters apart from masculine virtue. Early Confucians may have thought in these ways; however, were this project of a different scope, we would devote space to a discussion of how female xiao is a profound virtue in its own right and regard. All that is to say that the ancient world’s understanding of gender relations are problematic in their own right, but they are not without fruit for understanding the mystery of the Church’s relationship to Christ, provided we clarify what aspects of these relations can be appropriated.

28 See Knapp, Selfless Offspring, chapter 8.
In terms of the Church’s becoming “sons of God” as the Bride of Christ, the significance of the distinction between natural and participated xiao is weighty. Quite simply, in comparison with Christ’s Filial love, we must recognize in a very real sense that our xiao toward God is not “natural.” Our being made “sons of God” does not flow out of our love for God as he is – only within God’s life can this be true. Rather, we naturally love God as the divine force and source for life. We can appreciate God’s power and fear his wrath, but our obedience to God in the Church does not flow out of a perfect love for God based on our human capacities – to call God “Abba” is a gift enabled by Christ.

To this we must add, however, that the “unnaturalness” of the Church’s xiao is neither unfitting to human nature, nor due merely to the ontological disparity between the creature and God. Rather, the inability to offer God “natural” xiao is a product of the Fall. It is precisely the movement of pride to distinguish ourselves from God and to grasp divinity for ourselves that we realize how little we know God. The great irony of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the more we know about these matters, the less we are able to love God simply out of seeking union with our creator. Rather, sin awakens us to the ontological chasm that makes us afraid of intimacy. It is only when Peter looks down that he realizes he cannot walk on water; only in the reflexive pride of sin are we reminded we are not fit to love God.

The importance of this for an account of the Church’s xiao is it serves to remind us that the disparity between Christ’s natural xiao and the Church’s participation is a problem created on the human side of the relationship. To know God intimately as loving Father was never due to human beings simply because of the faculties of the human
person. However, God created the human person out of Fatherly love, and offered himself for intimate communion with Adam and Eve. In the economy of grace and creation, filial devotion to God was “natural” for the human person. Only in the alienation of sin is the division between nature and grace apparent.

Hence, the Church stands in a place of alienation from filial devotion from God. Only by the grace of the Bridegroom is the Church sacramentally ushered into the Son’s perfect love of God, which is natural to him, flowing out of the drama of Triune love. Through his Passion – the ultimate act of xiao since it is ritually enacted filial love – Christ opens up space “in his body” and invites the Church to enter into his filial reality as Bride and Body. Moreover, in communicating the Passion to us, Christ has given us the sacrament of Baptism (yet another act of ritual sonship!) which infuses the Christian with the theological virtues, including caritas. One way of seeing this gift of Baptism is that as Jesus welcomes us into the Bride of the Church, he bestows on each soul the habitus of his own love for God. Through this mystery, we die with him so that we may rise again into his natural, filial love of (and in) God.

3.3. Xiao, Dao and the Filius-Logos Relationship

Throughout Christian history, theologians have spoken of the second person of the Trinity as both the Son (Filius, Huios) and the Word (Verbum, Logos). The preference of individual theologians for each reference largely has depended on the preferred analogical style of considering the relations within God. The psychological approaches following Augustine tend toward an emphasis on the Word, whereas social

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29 Does Jesus Know Us? Do We Really Know Him?, 51. Here Balthasar says of the Eucharist, “In its wounds the body of Christ becomes the freely available habitation of the believers incorporated into it. The wounds are not healed and closed up, but transfigured and remain open.”

369
analogies tend to focus on the Son. Both are unquestionably legitimate, and we should not make too much of the difference, since most theologians do appeal to both titles to describe the Second Person, often in the course of the same discourse. The reason for the variation and preference is primarily due to the kinds of perfections one is trying to describe in God, or which scriptural passages are underpinning one’s particular interpretation.

Yet in spite of this, it seems that throughout Christian history one “problem” (by which I mean an unresolved mystery rather than a shortcoming) is how the scriptural testimony that the second person is the Son is continuous with its testimony that he is the Word. Such an interpenetration is already implied by the fact that it is the Fourth Gospel which introduces the language of Christ as Logos and, according to Balthasar’s reading at least, plumbs the profound depths of Christ’s life as Filius as well. But how do these vistas interpenetrate?

St. Thomas Aquinas did, it must be noted, speak to this interpenetration when he poses the question of whether the Word is the proper name of the Son. In the Summa, St. Thomas treats Son and Word, with the Word being the “personal” name of the Son. Both terms name the second Person of the Trinity on account of his unique procession from the Father. “Son” names the second Person’s procession as generation, whereas “Word” more specifically names the fact of intellectual emanation. In its own nature, the procession of the second Person is both – “Son” and “Word” name aspects of this procession.

This treatment is certainly an invaluable foundation, but it leads to the question of whether there is more beauty to this mystery that can be discovered. Specifically, what

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30 ST Ia, qq. 33-34.
more depth can be perceived of the *convenientissimum* that the Son and the Word are the same Trinitarian Person? Although it is obvious that what I offer here can be only suggestive in nature, I believe that developing the *Filius/Verbum* identity in terms of the early Confucianism proves a helpful lens for entering into the mysteries of the second Person. In modern Chinese translations of the New Testament, John 1:14a reads as follows: “Dao chengle roushen, zhuzai women zhongjian 道成了肉身，住在我們中間.” Thus, the testimony in Chinese is that the *Dao* was made flesh and dwelled among us. This translation, coupled with the argument of this dissertation, invites contemplation of Christ as the Incarnate Son and Logos under the Chinese pairs of *xiao* and *Dao*.

The first question we must ask, then, is how do *xiao* and the *Dao* interpenetrate? On the simplest level, the interpenetration is founded on *Dao*. The *Dao* is, as we have seen “the way of things” and as such includes *xiao* in itself: being *xiao* is part of the meaning of the *Dao*. Yet more importantly, being *xiao* is how the *Dao* is enacted in filial existence. Thus it is not merely that *xiao* sons live in accord with the *Dao*, but their actions as *xiao* sons make the *Dao* present: being *xiao* is the doing of the *Dao* and not just acting in accord with it.

On this basis, we can reflect on a similar movement of how the eternal Son is included in the conceptual schema of the *Logos*. Or, to better avoid confusion, we can reflect on how the *Logos* involves a filial movement that results in the apt title of his Triune life as the eternal Son. In traditional Catholic theology, the concept of the Second Person as *Logos* refers to God’s knowing himself, i.e., the rational, logical, and intelligible perfection in God that also grounds the participated perfections of the world.

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31 Xin Yue Quan Shu 新約全書, 241.
The *Logos* of God, then, must refer not only to the divine perfection as pure act or intellect, but also in the Trinitarian persons themselves. This is to say that within God, God “knows himself” as a Triune communion of love.

In this way, this suggests that the fact that God is perfect intellectual act is perfectly synonymous with the fact that God is love. For the Son to love the Father eternally and in equal dignity with the Father such that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both shows that the knowledge of God’s self is knowledge in and as love. Thus, the Son’s title is grounded in the Logic of God, “the way God is.” Yet at the same time, because God *is* the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the *Logos* of God – his self-knowing – *is* the processing from the Father as the Son. In a sense, we can say that the Second Person’s being the Son is the Trinitarian consequence of his being the *Logos*.

In terms of the Incarnation, this rather abstract formulation can be given more specific development. It is, as we have seen, impossible for a son to be *xiao* without knowledge of the *Dao*. Being *xiao* requires an internalization of the *Dao* in order to understand what form of filial love and obedience is required at a particular time. With Christ, his being the Son involves perfect knowledge of the Father as Father, and hence he understands not only what his mission is, but what actions he must take (or avoid) in order to perfectly fulfill his mission. Hence the filial love and obedience that marks the Incarnation is imbued with the Logical reality of the Second person.

Moreover, as we saw above, the reason Jesus’ *xiao* is perfect is because his obedience is geared toward the perfections of the divine Father. There we made much of the fact that for Jesus, doing the good and the Father’s *Dao* are coextensive. Now we can

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take a further step. When the Confucian tradition speaks of doing the father’s *dao*, it imagines this primarily as something standing over-against the son. One must be *xiao* by conforming to an external measure.

However, in Christ the Father’s *Dao* is coextensive with his sonship. He does not merely obey the Father’s *Dao*; he *is* the Father’s *Dao*. Jesus perfectly performs his Sonship in accordance with the *Dao* because he knows it *internally*, as he knows himself. Conversely, as the Incarnate *Logos*, Jesus knows himself perfectly and knows internally, in every aspect of his existence, that he is the eternally generated Son. His self-knowledge is thus truly a filial knowledge of the Father, and a knowing himself as Son. The upshot of this for Trinitarian theology is it suggests for us the fact that in God, loving and knowing are coextensive.33 In God, neither precedes the other. God’s self-knowledge is the Father’s generation of the Son, just as the Father’s generation of the Son is how God knows himself. Thus, there can be no intrinsic conflict between psychological and social conceptions of the Trinitarian mystery, for both are necessary to understand even in part what God has proclaimed in the person of Jesus. That Jesus’ proclamation of the Father is the expression of his personhood both as *Logos* and as *Filius* is a profound mystery that I find to be especially visible in light of the Confucian *xiao*.

33 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have endeavored to show how the early Confucian conception of *xiao* can be incorporated into the work of Christian theology. Taking Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Christology as somewhat of a mixture between test case and guide, I have argued that Christ’s obedience is a profound example of the fruit such an approach can bear for Christian theology. Quite simply Balthasar has taught us that Christ’s obedience lies at the heart of the miracle of the Incarnation; to speak of Christ’s obedience is to touch upon the mysteries of God’s life and God’s love for us. His obedience is unique and normative, and he understands himself only as the loving, obedient Son made flesh. Early Confucianism in turn teaches us that filial obedience is not weakness or subservience, but the cultivation of active virtue grounded in love and devotion that takes the “concreteness” of human life seriously. If I am to love my parents, I enact and perfect this love through service, mourning, and sacrificing to them, each imbued by ritual propriety and ritual acts (*li*).

Reading these perspectives in unity produces several benefits for Christian theology that I have entertained and upon which I have speculated. Importantly, I do not take these arguments regarding the specific fruit of this encounter as wholly original or representing a great advance on Christian theology, at least not simplistically. Indeed, following Chapter 1, I have assumed throughout that the Church already holds to the
Truth and lives within it, so the question is not about adding anything “new” in a strict sense. Rather, this reading between Balthasar’s presentation of Christ’s obedience and the Confucian xiao is meant to help gain a new perspective through which to view and contemplate the mysteries at the heart of the Church. The conclusions I have made as to the specific fruit of this encounter are thus viewing the constant and unchanging Truth of Christian proclamation from a different angle – much like turning the diamond 15 degrees so that one can see its other lines and perfections that have been hidden, forgotten, or which simply deserve our admiration.

To clarify, I think there is much novel in this dissertation (apart from its use of Chinese philosophy), but it must be understood as a “discovery” rather than invention. Appealing to Chinese philosophy does indeed allow us to see and adore new aspects of the mysteries of God’s self-revelation. But I stress this is discovery on two levels, both as finding out things about God as theology’s proper object, and discovering these new “divine things” within the fertile soil of the Church’s doctrines and dogma. With this method of theological incorporation, one is not “adding” to the Church’s teaching or “correcting” traditional insights. Rather, much like a paleontologist, the task is to go deeper into the bosom of the Church. Consequently, it means revisiting (résourcement) not only the “site” of the Church, but living within it and from it.

This leads me to consider theological incorporation as occurring within one of those great churches of Rome that appears infinite, with always another door or passage to discover. Yet in our search of the grounds for what mysteries it still holds, we will take notice of the statues once more, perhaps looking more closely at one saint or fresco that we simply rushed by on our entrance. While looking for the hidden rooms, we gain a
better appreciation for the construction of the building and marvel again at its brilliance. We may indeed find a new room or burial site – but along the way, we have also gained a reappreciation and rediscovery that aids the theological enterprise as much as those things of which we were previously unaware.

Thus this dissertation has been, at root, an attempt to show how Chinese philosophy can serve the truth of Christ. But because this is Christ as Truth and not simply empirical truth, it entails the movement of love. So, perhaps the final concluding word is simply this: knowing Chinese philosophy can enrich and expand our love and devotion to God. Much like reading Balthasar, I think reading Confucian philosophy makes one a better Christian. Anything more than this gained for the discipline of academic theology is simply a testimony to the self-diffusing goodness of God’s love for the world.
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