

Towards a Biblical Model of Spirituality Part 2: Deconstructing Christian Spirituality—Augustine, Martin Luther, and Teilhard de Chardin

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Introduction

We are living at a time of increasing fascination with the concept of spirituality, so much so that the “spirituality phenomenon” has come to define our era.¹ Yet what is meant by this term? Indeed, spirituality is an ambiguous word conveying a broad array of meanings, from a humanistic concern with the self, ethical standards, and cosmic connectivity (generic spirituality²), to the experience of humans with a transcendent Being (religious spirituality³). Within the realm of religious spirituality, Christian

¹ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014), 5.

² Bruce Demarest defines generic spirituality as the limitation of reason and science, subjectivism and self-transcendence, the rejection of dogmas, and a belief that all paths lead to God. Examples include New Age, process philosophy, and creation spirituality. *Four Views on Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 13.

³ Demarest defines religious spirituality as the pursuit of God through non-Christian faiths, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, 13. Demarest probably excludes Christianity from his list of religions since his book focuses specifically on this type of spirituality. In the broader context, however, religious spirituality would clearly include the Christian religion.

spirituality⁴ has centered on union with God.⁵ But are all forms of Christian spirituality equal? We know Christ affirms: “I am the way” (John 14:6), yet he also gives a chilling end-day verdict of false spirituality: “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness (*anomia*)!’” (Matt 7:22). These Christ-naming spiritual teachers, powerful and popular with the masses, *never knew Jesus*. Clearly, not all forms of Christian spirituality result in a union with God that is Christ indwelling, law exalting, and eternal-life promoting. The challenge, then, is to discern between authentic and counterfeit spiritualities.

The aim of this three-part study is to articulate Scripture’s distinctive model of spirituality—union with God through the sanctuary-covenant structure—as a biblically faithful alternative to models shaped by philosophical presuppositions. Part 1⁶ defined spirituality and traced the early deviations of Christian spirituality from its biblical foundations. This present article, Part 2, deconstructs three influential models of Christian spirituality—classical (Augustine), Protestant (Martin Luther), and modern (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)—by analyzing their macro-hermeneutical assumptions. Part 3 will then present the biblical model as revealed in Yahweh’s self-disclosure in the Exodus sanctuary-covenant and compare all four models, demonstrating that the biblical one is unique in both foundation and method.

In Part 1 we began by exploring the cognitive foundations of spirituality in the apostolic church noting Paul’s exhortation to not be conformed (*suschématizó*⁷) to the world, but to be transformed

⁴ In Demarest’s analysis, Christian spirituality is represented by four traditions: Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, progressive Protestant, and evangelical. Demarest, *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, 17.

⁵ Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2002), 1.

⁶ “Towards a Biblical Model of Spirituality, Part 1: Historical and Theological Background” JATS 30/1-2 (2019): 227-245.

⁷ *Suschématizó* means to follow the same (sys) pattern or schema (schema). In cognitive science, schema theory explains how the brain organizes and applies knowledge. In other words, a schema can function as a macro-hermeneutical/philosophical principle. P. DiMaggio, “Culture and Cognition,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23 (1997): 263–287. For a definition of macro hermeneutics see footnote 16.

(*metamorphoó*⁸) into the image of God through the renewing of the mind, which is their reasonable (*logikon*⁹) service.¹⁰ And yet even at that early date Paul warned of a mystical spirituality infiltrating the church, a spirituality that bypassed all rational thinking based on God's law and instead centered on experiencing the immediate presence of God.¹¹

Second, we compared mysticism¹² with biblical mystery. We saw that by the fifth century AD Pseudo-Dionysius¹³ had introduced mysticism into the church, coining the term *mystical theology*, which he related to symbols and rituals that go beyond a cognitive relation with God "to a real union with Him in the 'truly mystic darkness of unknowing.'"¹⁴ We then contrasted mystical spirituality with biblical mystery—with God as the

⁸ *Metamorphoó* can also be translated as "to transfigure." In its three other NT appearances it is used twice of Christ's transfiguration (Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2) and once in 2 Cor. 3:18, explaining the believer's transfiguration from glory to glory through a correct understanding of Christ's role in OT law.

⁹ *Logikon*—Paul affirms that the call to transformation is logical, meaning it rationally evaluates the cost-benefit analysis of renouncing the world's thinking/philosophy and adopting God's.

¹⁰ Romans 12:2.

¹¹ Paul warns repeatedly against the gnostic heresies attempting to infiltrate the church (1 Tim 6:20–21, Col 2:8, 1 Cor 1:18–31). Among other things Paul denounces the Neoplatonic ideas present in the over-realized eschatology in the church, where some were teaching that Jesus had already returned and was present in believers in a mystical or spiritual way (2 Thess 2:1–4, cf. 1 Thess 4:13–18). See Bacchiocchi, "The Lord's Supper in the Early Church: Covenant Extension or Eucharistic Presence?" *AUSSJ* 2 (2017): 35–55.

¹² The word *mustērion*, meaning "hidden" or "secret thing," has been in use since the ancient Greeks. It was derived from *misein*, meaning "to close the eyes or lips," and "initiate" into mystery religion where initiates swore secrecy to what was revealed.

¹³ Pseudo-Dionysius, also known as Dionysius the Aeropagite or simply as Denys was a Neoplatonic philosopher and theologian who lived around the 5th–6th centuries and wrote under the guise of being the first-century Dionysius whom Paul converted to Christianity while in Athens (Acts 17:34). Although there was some uncertainty as to whether he was truly Paul's Athenian convert, this belief was generally accepted until the 19th century. As such his mystical theology influenced many church leaders, including Martin Luther, as we shall see below.

¹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius saw God as timeless and hence unable relate with spatiotemporal realities. He writes that when Moses entered the cloud at the top of Mount Sinai, he broke from a rational understanding of God and "[plunged] into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing. 'Mystical Theology' in *Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Paul Rorem (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 137. According to Pseudo-Dionysius, mystical theology does cannot persuade us cognitively, but simply acts on us like a supernatural force. See F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, eds. 3rd ed. rev. "Mysticism, Mystical Theology" *ODCC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1134.

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great Revealer of mysteries, namely the plan of salvation through Christ's expiatory and mediatorial role in the sanctuary-covenant structure.¹⁵

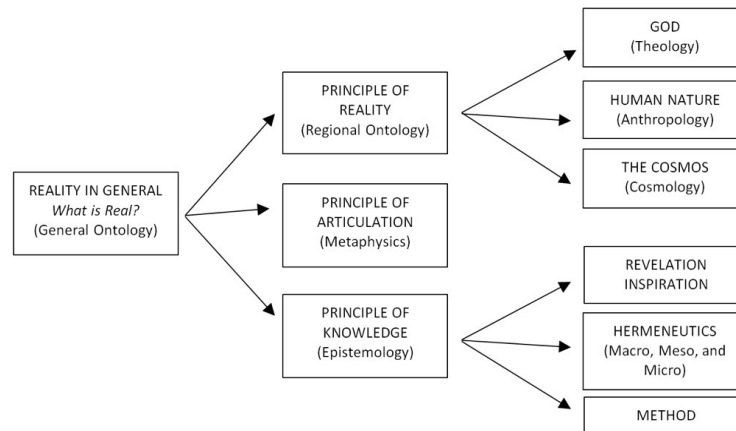
In the third section we took a detour from Scripture to note the proper ground for understanding spirituality—namely philosophy—and saw that Scripture presents its own macro-hermeneutical¹⁶ (philosophical) interpretation of Being/reality as temporal. The fourth section explored Christ's macro-hermeneutical/philosophical system as based on (1) Scripture as the epistemological foundation, (2) Christ's sanctuary role as ontological ground, and (3) Bible prophecy and sanctuary typology as the metaphysical center that holds everything together.

¹⁵ Following Pseudo Dionysius, many theologians interpreted God as unknowable by reason or history, misinterpreting texts which say God dwells in a thick cloud (Lev 16:2, 2 Chron 6:1, Psalm 97:2). However, rather than indicating His separation from history, these and similar texts reveal that the cloud was an indication of Christ's guiding presence in Israelite history (1 Cor 10:1–2), particularly above the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, from which He revealed His will to the Israelite nation (Exod 25:22; 33:9). The moment Moses entered the cloud, God began to speak instructions about building the sanctuary in order to dwell with Israel (Exod 24:18–25:9). The cloud of God's presence did not mean He was shrouded in mystery, but the opposite—His desire to dwell among His people and speak with them, that they might know and do His will, thereby entering into union with Him and blessing all nations.

¹⁶ Biblical hermeneutics occurs on three levels: micro, meso, and macro. The more specific or micro-hermeneutical level relates to textual interpretation (exegesis), the middle or meso-hermeneutical level relates to doctrinal development (systematic theology), and the macro-hermeneutical level is the grounding, most foundational level (reality) of biblical interpretation. Here, theologians have traditionally viewed reality using the Greek philosophical interpretation of Being (general ontology) as timeless which then determines God's nature (theology proper), human nature (anthropology), the world (cosmology), knowledge (epistemology), and the relation of the parts to the whole (metaphysics). The ontological presupposition of timelessness prevented theologians from seeing that Scripture contains its own interpretation of Being as analogically temporal and hence able to effectively communicate with sentient beings. Part 1 briefly looked at Scripture's macro-hermeneutical presuppositions (see following diagram). Part 3 will explore the biblical presuppositions through the Exodus sanctuary-covenant structure.

Part 1 concluded with an analysis of 1 Corinthians 2 where Paul notes that all are guided by one of two spirit-teaching philosophies: Either (1) human philosophy taught by the spirit/rulers of the world or (2) biblical philosophy taught by God's Spirit in Scripture.

Paul ends by saying, "he who is spiritual [converted man] judges all things."¹⁷ Similarly John exhorts, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test [*dokimázō*] the spirits [philosophies] to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."¹⁸ The Greek *dokimázō*, means "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize" whether something is genuine. Paul did this by "overthrowing arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."¹⁹ In other words, the spiritual/philosophical warfare of the church is to overthrow (*kathaireó* "take down, depose") arguments (*logismos* "reasoning or thinking") or anything that exalts itself in traditional thinking yet is in opposition to the true knowledge of God in Christ. Hence Part 2 will examine or deconstruct what Christian tradition has taught about union with God.



¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:15.

¹⁸ 1 John 4:1.

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Deconstruction as Theological Method²⁰

Elsewhere I have written on the philosophical history of deconstruction and how it overlaps with the biblical mandate to deconstruct tradition's exalted claims.²¹ There I trace the positive gains of postmodernism, particularly showing how Derridean deconstruction²² contains elements useful for a biblically faithful, Christ-centered deconstruction of Christianity's theological traditions. Yet in contrast to Derridean deconstruction, biblical deconstruction is not a deconstruction applied to Scripture but from Scripture to traditional Christian interpretations, beliefs, and practices.²³ This deconstruction must address the underlying presuppositions of knowledge. For as we saw in Part 1 every teaching or belief begins with grounding assumptions—known or unconscious—regarding ultimate reality.²⁴

²⁰ The categories that comprise the theological method are (1) The *material condition*, meaning the data that grounds theological thought. In biblical theology this arises from Scripture and engages all of Scripture, the *sola* and *tota Scriptura* principles, (2) The *hermeneutical condition*, where the data is interpreted on the basis of biblically derived, macro-hermeneutical principles, namely epistemology, ontology and metaphysics, and (3) the *teleological condition* or goal, ultimately this would be to understand and know God, although it would also include specific intermediary goals. Fernando Canale, *Creation, Evolution, and Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 101–122.

²¹ See Silvia Canale Bacchiocchi, "Christ-centered Deconstruction as Biblical Method" *Theologika* 37 (2022): 92–125.

²² Briefly, deconstruction is a critical reading of traditions. In the late 1960s Jacques Derrida introduced the term philosophically. In John Caputo's interview with Derrida, the latter describes deconstruction as having three components: textual, transgressive, and messianic. In short, deconstruction focuses on reading texts (textual element) in a way that counters (transgressive element) interpretive tradition, with the intent of providing a new redemptive religious outlook (messianic element). John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1996). While neither Derrida nor Caputo systematize these three elements, Fernando Canale reads them as Derrida's overriding method. See Canale, "Deconstructing Evangelical Theology," 105.

²³ The study presents Fernando Canale as the first theologian-philosopher to deconstruct theological reason from its onto→theo→logical direction adopted via Greek philosophy's view of being as timeless, to a biblically constructed theo→onto→logical view of being as analogically temporal. The study also offers examples of biblical theologians of deconstruction such as Raul Kerbs, John Peckham, and others, showing how biblically centered deconstruction is the only method that will reap clearer doctrinal insight and the reception of greater light.

²⁴ Every single person, whether they are aware of it or not, has these basic assumptions about reality. These beliefs may be grounded in the study of Scripture, other books, or simply absorbed through popular culture. The quest to define these basic presuppositions

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Our current task in Part 2 is to analyze the macro-hermeneutical foundations of three primary models²⁵ of Christian spirituality, namely the classical, Protestant, and modern. Each will be analyzed through its selected representative: Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, respectively.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) will serve as representative of the classical model, not only because he is considered by many as “the Father of the Western Church,”²⁶ but specifically because Augustinian spirituality became the foundation for all later Christianity.²⁷ Roger Olson notes that Augustine “pointed the entire West in a certain direction.”²⁸ Likewise, in his historical compilation of spirituality Charles Healey upholds Augustine’s writings as profoundly formative for later spirituality.²⁹ And

is philosophical because it explores the nature of reality at its core. The basic question of general ontology is *What is real or what is Being?* In the area of regional ontology/theology—*Is there a supernatural Being?* In regional ontology/anthropology—*What is the origin and purpose of mankind?* And in regional ontology/cosmology—*How did the world originate, and what is its purpose or end?*

²⁵ In the present study, *model* refers to the articulation of a doctrine’s essential features. Models are “ideal, simplified, and schematic accounts of a much more complex reality.” While models have their limits (they are not exact, all-inclusive, or provable), they are essential in helping to identify the basic characteristics of theological schools or trends. See Fernando Luis Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundation of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* (Lanham, MD; Oxford: University Press of America, 2001), 76. Also, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Lithotech, 2005), 113–118. Other theologians who have advocated and applied the concept of models or paradigms in their theologies are Avery Dulles—in his ecclesiological ordering, and Hans Küng—in his search for an ecumenical paradigm that unifies current theologies, such as political, process, feminist, black and non-western liberation theologies. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 29; Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 123–130. See also Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology: Task and Methods,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011), 1:38–39.

²⁶ Tony Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, 47. Justo Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, 242.

²⁷ The Augustinian tradition in spirituality [. . .] was the common heritage of the Christian laity and of many religious orders in medieval and modern times.” Augustine of Hippo: *Selected Writings*, ed. John Farina, trans. Mary T. Clark (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), 3.

²⁸ *The Story of Christianity: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 255.

²⁹ Healey, Charles J. *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage*. (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul’s, 2008), 71. Healey also notes patristic scholar Berthold Altaner’s

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Philip Sheldrake summarizes Augustine's influence on Christian spirituality saying he is "without doubt the greatest thinker of Western Christianity in the early period, and his writings have dominated Western theology and spirituality ever since."³⁰

The representative for the Protestant model of spirituality will be Martin Luther (1483–1540), whose reformation of the church caused spirituality to hinge not on ecclesiastical hierarchy but on the believer's direct access to God through faith, namely justification by faith.³¹ Louis Bouyer states that Luther was the first to propose a "genuinely lay spirituality."³² And Healy notes that Luther's emphasis on the Word of God became the center of Protestant spirituality.³³ In recent years Luther's theology of spirituality—justification as union with God—has seen a renaissance in the Finnish school,³⁴ which has been working (successfully) to foment ecumenical dialogue and convergence,³⁵ most recently between Lutheran and Catholic churches.³⁶

evaluation of Augustine: "The great bishop united in himself the creative energy of Tertullian and the breadth of spirit of Origen with the ecclesiastical sensitivity of Cyprian; the dialectical acumen of Aristotle with the soaring idealism and speculation of Plato; the practical sense of the Latins with the spiritual subtlety of the Greeks. He was the greatest philosopher of the patristic era and, without doubt, the most important and influential theologian of the Church in general." Ibid.

³⁰ *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 37.

³¹ McGrath, 389.

³² Quoted in Healy, 233.

³³ Healy, 232.

³⁴ See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005). Also, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Carl E. Braaten, *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: 1998); Bengt R. Hoffmann and Pearl Willemssen Hoffman, *Theology of the Heart: The Role of Mysticism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Kirk House, 2003); Bengt R. Hoffmann's *Luther & the Mystics* (Augsburg Publishing House: 1976). Volker Leppin, "Luther's Mystical Roots" in *Martin Luther: A Christian Between Reforms and Modernity (1517–2017)*, ed. Alberto Melloni (Boston, MA: Hubert & Co, 2017).

³⁵ Karkkainen, 7–9.

³⁶ One example of ecumenical convergence is the Finnish school's contribution to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999. Bruce L. McCormack, "What's at Stake in Current Debates over Justification?" in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands, and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 95.

Finally, the selected representative for the modern model of spirituality will be Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). Teilhard was a trained paleontologist and Jesuit Priest whose efforts to reconcile the modern theory of evolution with Catholic teaching initially resulted in censorship by the Catholic church, yet his writings were later accepted³⁷ and incorporated into the documents of Vatican II.³⁸ Teilhard's teachings have since been positively referenced by notable Catholic leaders such as Pope John Paul II,³⁹ Joseph Ratzinger,⁴⁰ and the present Pope Francis.⁴¹ Catholic theologian and scientist Ilia Delio, perhaps Teilhard's most vocal disciple, has written twenty-four books that in one way or another support Teilhard's spiritual vision. Delio calls Teilhard "the new Elijah, calling forth a new path of salvation in the twenty-first century."⁴² She has written on educating AI to help establish a global spirituality in the third

³⁷ Specifically, it was Henri de Lubac, Teilhard's friend and Vatican II *peritus* (theological expert), who worked to clear Teilhard of any hint of unorthodoxy and establish him as an influential Catholic thinker. Fergus Kerr, "Henri de Lubac" in *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern*, eds. Staale Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 207.

³⁸ Justo Gonzales calls him "the most original of the Vatican II theologians." *The Story of Christianity*, 450. And Wolfgang Smith believes Teilhard's thought was such a key component at Vatican II that it is "difficult to distinguish the impact of Teilhardian beliefs from that of the Council. *Theistic Evolution: The Teilhardian Heresy* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2012), 225.

³⁹ Pope John Paul II states that "the Eucharist is also celebrated to offer 'on the altar of the whole earth the world's work and suffering' in the beautiful words of Teilhard de Chardin." *Gift and Mystery* (New York, NY: Image, 1996), 73.

⁴⁰ "Against the background of the modern evolutionary world view, Teilhard depicted the cosmos as a process of ascent, a series of unions . . . From here Teilhard went on to give new meaning to Christian worship: the transubstantiated Host is the anticipation of the transformation and divinization of matter in the Christological 'fullness.' In his view, the Eucharist provided the movement of the cosmos with its direction; it anticipates its goal and at the same time urges it on." *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 334. See also *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000), 28–29 and *The Unity of the Church*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 23.

⁴¹ In May 2015, Pope Francis referenced the contribution of Teilhard in his encyclical *Laudato Si* "on Care for our Common Home."

⁴² Ilia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), xvi. Ursula King, a German theologian and scholar of religion, also specializes in Teilhardian theology. See *Spirit of One Earth: Reflections on Teilhard de Chardin and Global Spirituality* (Paragon Press, 1998). *Christ in All Things: Exploring Spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), and *Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions: Spirituality and Mysticism in an Evolutionary World* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011).

millennium—of course, along Teilhardian lines.⁴³ Indeed, according to mathematician and metaphysician Wolfgang Smith, Teilhard’s impact on Christian spirituality from the time of Vatican II to the present has been “deep, pervasive, and lasting.”⁴⁴ In fact, Smith believes Teilhard’s influence has permanently altered the church to the point that “in certain respects and to some degree [the Church] has in fact turned Teilhardian.”⁴⁵

Philosophical Precursors of Christian Spirituality

Before delving into our models of Christian spirituality, it is helpful to take a brief look at three philosophical precursors of Christian spirituality—Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus. Parmenides (540–485 BC) was the first Greek philosopher to introduce a concept of Being, positing an ontological separation between:

- (1) reality or *Aletheia*, defined as timeless, and
- (2) opinion or *Doxa*, defined as temporal and belonging to the illusory realm of the senses.⁴⁶ Plotinus held that to arrive at the knowledge of truth (epistemology) one must deny or negate sensory things, a concept termed the *via negativa* or way of negation (later it was also called apophatic theology, from *apophēmī*, meaning ‘to deny’).⁴⁷ Plato (c. 428–348 BC) later expanded Plotinus’s two ways by introducing two distinct worlds: an earthly physical world of the senses and a heavenly divine realm of the presumably immaterial immortal soul.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Re-Enchanting the Earth: Why AI Needs Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020).

⁴⁴ *Theistic Evolution: The Teilhardian Heresy*, 225.

⁴⁵ *Theistic Evolution: The Teilhardian Heresy*, 225.

⁴⁶ See Raul Kerbs, *El Problema De La Identidad Biblica Del Cristianismo: Las Presuposiciones Filosoficas de la Teologia Cristiana: Desde Los Presocraticos al Protestantismo* (Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2014), 77. While other Greek philosophers speculated about the physical world and cosmology, Parmenides discovered the “proper theme” of philosophy, the Entity, defining it as timeless, one, uncreated, imperishable and perfect. Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy* (New York, NY: Dover, 1967), 20, 22. And it was Parmenides’ interpretation of the Entity as timeless—as well as his *via negativa*—that directed the entire course of western philosophy and theology from the presocratics to the twentieth century, when Martin Heidegger offered an alternate interpretation of Being as temporal. Kerbs, 79. See also Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 7, 9.

⁴⁷ Kerbs, 78–79. See also Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Fieser, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 7th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 16.

⁴⁸ Kerbs, 108–109.

Centuries later Plotinus (c. 204–270) reintroduced Platonism, adding to Platonic dualism the elements of divine emanation, participation, and *theosis*. Plotinus rejected the Christian worldview of creation *ex nihilo*, of sin as the cause for separation from God, and of restoration to God through Christ’s life and sacrificial death. Instead, Plotinus presented a worldview centered on divine emanation in a pantheistic cosmos where a spark from the divine—composed of the One, the Nous, and the Universal-Soul—inhabits every level in the hierarchy of beings.⁴⁹ In his narrative, the fall occurred as human souls detached from the Universal-Soul, fell to earth, and became imprisoned in a physical body. The method to reunite with the One requires the practice of ecstasy: to suppress all thought, to see without seeing, and ultimately encounter pure and absolute light. The main avenues to ecstasy were music, love, and philosophy; any of these might transport the fallen soul to the realm of the intelligible, and then to union with the One.⁵⁰

It is important to note that by the time of Plotinus, Christianity had already deviated from the teachings of Scripture, such as interpreted by Paul and the apostles.⁵¹ The first two centuries AD were an age of syncretism, where ideas taken from various sources were repackaged into new philosophies or religions. For instance, Philo (25 BC–50 AD) merged Judaism with Platonism, and Origen (185–254 AD) used Stoic and Platonic foundations as his framework for Christianity.⁵² But without doubt the most formidable and influential thinker to combine Platonism with the emerging Christianity was Augustine, with whom we begin our survey of Christian spirituality.

But first a word on the form our study will follow. In order to deconstruct the three models of spirituality—classical, Protestant, and modern—we will explore each model’s macro-hermeneutical presuppositions (ontology, theology, anthropology, epistemology, cosmology, and metaphysics). As mentioned, the reason these philosophical categories must be explored in relation to spirituality is because they comprise the basic presuppositions of reason which the mind always assumes, consciously or unconsciously, when thinking about any

⁴⁹ Neoplatonism’s divinity is a graded triad (three hypostases or persons) comprised of the One, the Nous, and the Soul. Plotinus, *Enneads*, xxxi.

⁵⁰ Kerbs, *El Problema de la Identidad Biblical del Cristianismo*, 189–192.

⁵¹ Bacchiocchi, “The Lord’s Supper in the Early Church: Covenant Extension or Eucharistic Presence?” *AUSSJ* 2 (2017): 35–55.

⁵² Stumpf and Feiser, 107.

subject.⁵³ At the end we will summarize our findings, noting how the above-mentioned mystical philosophical foundations bear fruit in each model. Specifically, we will note that their paradigms utilize and endorse the *via negativa*, timelessness of Being, human dualistic anthropology, two-world cosmology, a suprarational union with God, divinization, and panentheism.⁵⁴

The Classical Model: Augustine of Hippo Interpretation of Being, God, and Human Nature (Ontology)

The theology of Augustine of Hippo (354–430) is so grounded in Platonic philosophy that he has been called “the most influential Christian Platonist of all time.”⁵⁵ Stumpf and Feiser include this church father in their survey of philosophy noting that “through Augustine Neoplatonism became a decisive element in the intellectual expression of the Christian faith.”⁵⁶ Indeed, Augustine believed that writings of the Platonists⁵⁷ “conveyed in every possible way, albeit indirectly, the truth of God and his Word.”⁵⁸ Thus, following the Neoplatonic view, Augustine defines

⁵³ For example, the cosmological assumption that the world has evolved over time, or that there are two worlds (as in Platonic thought), will lead to a different view of spirituality than if one assumes the biblical creation account and a unified cosmos. For more on the structure of reason in regard to the mind’s basic presuppositions see Kerbs, 29–39.

⁵⁴ The difference between panentheism and pantheism is that the former believes “*all is in God*” (God interpenetrates humanity immanently yet transcends it timelessly), whereas the latter states that “*all is God*” (God as imminent, non-personal, and non-anthropomorphic). The term *panentheism* was coined by Karl Krause (1781–1832), a contemporary of Schleiermacher and Hegel, and popularized by Charles Hartshorne in the mid-twentieth century. As such, while it is anachronistic to refer to anyone prior to the twentieth century as a panentheist, their theology can still be qualified as such. See John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 26–27.

⁵⁵ Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34. Cary also notes that it is not, as some scholars have suggested, that Augustine began as a Platonist and then moved on to a mature Catholic orthodoxy, but rather that his Platonism “grew in tandem with his Christian orthodoxy,” 35.

⁵⁶ *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 112.

⁵⁷ Although Augustine cites Plato as the foundation for his thought, the books he read and the Platonism he encountered in Milan was that of Plato’s followers, mainly Plotinus and his pupil Porphyry. Thus, Augustine’s philosophy is more properly termed Neoplatonism. Gillian Clark, Introduction to *Augustine’s Confessions: Books I–IV* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19–20.

⁵⁸ *Confessions*, 147.

Being or *That Which Is*, as timeless and immutable.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the only way the human subject can know the divine subject is through the human soul, which Augustine also considers to be timeless (immortal) and immutable.⁶⁰ Because his dualistic anthropology saw the material body as weighing down the immaterial soul,⁶¹ spirituality or union with God is achieved, as we shall see, by the rational soul's rising from temporal things (including the words of Scripture) to the timeless vision of truth, namely God. This is passing from faith to the beatific vision.

Union with God through the Soul's Higher Reason (Epistemology)

For Augustine, union with God or the knowledge of God (epistemology) is accomplished via the soul's higher reason. Augustine views the soul as having two parts: a lower reason (*ratio inferior*), which deals with sensory-temporal contents, and a higher reason (*ratio superior*), which has prior knowledge of immutable truth and gives meaning to sensory knowledge.⁶² Augustine believes this higher reason retains the image of God and thus speaks to the human soul as God himself.⁶³ As such, true knowledge does not arise from the biblical words themselves, but from the soul's higher reason interpreting the eternal ideas believed to be implicit in the words. Thus, when Augustine reflects on Scripture he engages his soul's higher reason, which he believes speaks to him—or to

⁵⁹ In *Being/That Which Is* “there is no ‘has been’ or ‘will be,’ but only being, for she is eternal, but past and future do not belong to eternity.” *Confessions*, 188; He [the Creator] has always existed in unchangeable eternity. . . time passing away by its changefulness, cannot be co-eternal with changeless eternity.” *City of God*, 397. “. . . in His wholeness everywhere, yet without place, eternal without time, making things that are changeable, without change of Himself, and without passion. *On the Trinity*, in P. Schaff, trans. A. W. Haddan, *St. Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 3. 88.

⁶⁰ “God, then, made man in His own image. For He created for him a soul endowed with reason and intelligence. . . And when He had formed the man out of the dust of the earth and had willed that his soul should be such as I have said—whether He had already made it, and now by breathing imparted it to man, or rather made it by breathing, so that the breath which God made by breathing. . . is the soul.” “The human soul is truly affirmed to be immortal.” Augustine, *The City of God*, 407, 412; *Confessions*, 147.

⁶¹ After an attempt to attain a vision of God, Augustine laments, “I knew that I was not yet capable of clinging, because the perishable body weighs down the soul, and its earthly habitation oppresses a mind teeming with thoughts.” *Confessions*, 138.

⁶² See Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 27. Also Raul Kerbs, *El Problema de la Identidad Biblica*, 368–370.

⁶³ *Confessions*, 337–338.

his “inner ear”—as God. So, for example, when Scripture says God is temporal, Augustine’s inner ear loudly rejects that notion and interprets the opposite, namely, that God is timeless.⁶⁴

Not only does higher reason elevate the soul as it ‘interprets’ Scripture, it must also eclipse Scripture and rational thought in order to see God as He is. This ability of the soul to elevate into the divine realm is what allows humans to exit the sensory world and enter God’s “eternal now” where they can take in all knowledge with one glimpse of the beatific vision. For example, in his *Confessions* Augustine narrates an experience of contemplation. He explains how he begins thinking on material things, then rises to the soul, then goes further to the inner power of the soul, arriving at higher reason and finally to the source of its intelligence—a light which he terms *the Unchangeable*: “And then my mind attained to *That Which Is*, in the flash of one tremulous glance. Then indeed did I perceive your invisible reality.”⁶⁵ Because Augustine espouses the Neoplatonic teaching that all beings participate to a lesser or greater degree in divinity, the road to absolute truth and the *visio Dei* occurs simply by turning within.⁶⁶

Another example of occurs later in the *Confessions* when Augustine recounts having a joint vision with his mother, Monica. After speaking about God’s works “we arrived at the summit of our own minds; and this too we transcended, to touch that land of never-failing plenty were you

⁶⁴ In this way, Augustine believes anything he says when spiritually inspired is as if God Himself is speaking. We see an example of this when Augustine questions the Genesis account of creation: “Surely, Lord, this scripture of yours is true, since you are its author and you are trustful—indeed Truth itself? Why then do you tell me that there is no element of time in your seeing, whereas your scripture tells me that day after day you saw that your work was good? I was even able to count these occasions, and find out how many times you looked at your creatures. You reply to me, because you are my God, and *you speak loudly in your servant’s inner ear*, bursting through my deafness; you cry out to me “Listen human, creature: what my scripture says, I myself say, but whereas scripture says it in terms of time, my Word is untouched by time, because he subsists with me eternally, equal to myself. *What you see through my Spirit, I see, just as what you say through my Spirit, I say.* You see these things in terms of time, but I do not see in time, nor when you say these things in temporal fashion do I speak in a way conditioned by time.” *Confessions*, 13. 29. 44.

⁶⁵ *Confessions*, 138–139. Italics original.

⁶⁶ “The way to knowing God goes from mutable things to the interiority of the soul, and from there to eternal truths that are in the mind of God. It is an interior way. . . . Only in his spiritual interiority can man find God, who is a spiritual being.” Kerbs, 373. My translation. See also Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

pasture Israel forever. . . We just touched the edge of [*That Which Is*] by the utmost leap of our hearts.”⁶⁷ Augustine continues in rapturous poetry, speaking of the need to pass beyond the soul to hear the word of God himself, “not through fleshy tongue nor angel’s voice, nor thundercloud, any riddling parable, *hear him unmediated*. . . Hear him without them, . . . and in a flash of thought touch that eternal Wisdom.”⁶⁸ Here we see that biblical narratives, parables, and prophetic utterances must be left behind: “all other visions, so far inferior, [must] be taken away, and this [beatific] sight alone ravish him who saw it, and engulf him and hide him away, kept for inward joys, so that this moment of knowledge—this passing moment that left us aching for more—there should be life eternal.”⁶⁹

The Role of Scripture

From the above we also note that for Augustine the divine words of Scripture are merely a temporal wrapping for timeless truth, a stepping stool to the “unmediated” vision of eternal Wisdom. Scripture does not reveal God as He is “in himself,” but as He is “for us.”⁷⁰ We note this Neoplatonic dualism—God “in himself” vs. God “for us”—in the distinction Augustine establishes between the outward and inner ear. Speaking of the Genesis creation account Augustine says:

⁶⁷ *Confessions*, 9. 10. 24.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 9. 10. 25. Italics mine.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ This dualism between God “for us” and God “in Himself” was established in Greek dualistic philosophy. Early Christianity adopted Greek dualism in the form of the economic and immanent Trinity. Early Christianity taught that the economic Trinity denotes God’s acts in the history of redemption (time), while the immanent Trinity refers to God in His eternal ontological essence (timelessness). Only the immanent Trinity is considered the true God, God “in Himself,” while the economic Trinity—all God’s historical actions, including the writing of Scripture—are temporal and “for us,” an illusion without being or, at best, a distortion of the real God. See Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, Lithotech, 2005), 64–73, 79, and Kerbs, 220. Hence Augustine quotes God as saying that His truth (spoken in the intuitive “inner ear”) is “totally different” than what is recorded in Scripture (words having “no being”). Biblically, there is a distinction between the fullness of God in Himself (God’s transcendence) and what He reveals, yet what God reveals in history and Scripture is authentic reality in keeping with His transcendent being, and not, as Greek philosophy and Neoplatonism assert, an illusion without being. The reality of God’s historical acts and words will be explored further in Part 3.

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These words of yours, in their temporal expression, would be reported by the *outward ear* to the mind of any discerning listener whose *inner ear* was attuned to your eternal Word. The mind would then compare the words sounding in time with your silent Word in eternity, and say, “*These are something different, totally different. They are far below me and have no being*, since they are fleeting and ephemeral; but the Word of my God is above me and abides forever.”⁷¹

In this way Augustine dismisses the reality of God’s words in Scripture, which are only “truth for the eyes of the flesh,” not truth itself.⁷² Moreover, Augustine believes that once a person has perfected contemplation, Scripture is unnecessary: Anyone “resting upon faith, hope and love. . . does not need the Scriptures except for the purpose of instructing others.”⁷³ But even faith is no longer needed when the greater virtue—love—is known: What timelessness is to temporality, truth is to faith,⁷⁴ so that the sum of redemption history is love.⁷⁵ Therefore, Augustine teaches that even an erroneous interpretation of Scripture is acceptable as long as it foments the greater virtue of love.⁷⁶

In summary, Augustine’s view of Being—and therefore of God—as timeless and immutable, makes God incapable of interacting in human history let alone cognitively communicating with humans from within space and time. Instead of the cognitively-engaged personal God of Scripture, Augustine’s God statically preordains all things in His timeless eternity, with history merely playing it out.⁷⁷ Thus, the Augustinian view

⁷¹ *Confessions*, 11. 6. 8. Italics mine.

⁷² Kerbs, 384, 385.

⁷³ *On Christian Doctrine* in *St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, P. Schaff, ed., trans. J. F. Shaw (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887). (Vol. 2, 534).

⁷⁴ In this Augustine is referencing a saying by an unidentified Greek philosopher. *On the Trinity*, 18. 24.

⁷⁵ The goal of redemption history is to understand that “the fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves.” *On Christian Doctrine*, 534.

⁷⁶ “If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from [the Scriptures] that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception.” *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.36.

⁷⁷ “But if we speak of that will of His which is eternal as His foreknowledge, certainly *He has already done all things in heaven and on earth that He has willed*—not only past and present things, but even things still future.” *City of God*, 22.2. Augustine’s writings are

of spirituality is that the divine and human subjects cannot know each other cognitively in historical life. Instead to “know” God, humans must surpass everything temporal (including Scripture) and be suspended in a timeless contemplation of a luminous vision of love that enthralls the soul.

Cosmology

Thus far we have noted how Augustine’s view of Being (timeless, immutable) conditions his view of God’s nature (timeless, immutable), human nature (dualism of timeless soul and temporal body), and knowing (abstraction of timeless truths/mystical contemplation). Augustine’s view of timeless Being also determines his cosmology which accommodates evolution through progressive creationism.⁷⁸ Reflecting on the Genesis creation narrative, Augustine employs the stoic and Neoplatonic theory of *logoi spermatikoi*, sometimes translated “seedlike principles” or “seminal reasons” from which subsequent life evolved. Augustine explains that God used angels to place rational seeds (*rationes seminales*) in the world which would from time to time spawn the creation of visible entities when conditions were ripe for their generation.⁷⁹ In short, Augustine’s God created a world with the inherent power to generate new life forms.⁸⁰

merely what God has preordained or willed for His glory: “Eternity belongs to you, O Lord, so surely you can neither be ignorant of what I am telling you, nor view what happens in time as though you were conditioned by time yourself. Why then am I relating all this to you at such length? Certainly not in order to inform you. I do it to arouse my own loving devotion toward you, and that of my readers, so that together we may declare Great is the Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise. . . . See, then, how long a tale I have told you, as best I could and as I truly wanted to, because *you first willed that I should confess to you, my Lord and God.*” *Confessions*, 11. 1. 1.

⁷⁸ This is an example of minimal accommodation of evolution. An example of maximal accommodation would be process theology. See Canale, *Creation, Evolution and Theology*, 124.

⁷⁹ For Augustine this progressive creation comes about through the agency of angels, both good and evil: “so it is not right to think not only the bad but even the good angels to be creators, if, through the subtilty [sic] of their perception and body, they know the seeds of things which to us are more hidden, and scatter them secretly through fit temperings [sic] of the elements, and so furnish opportunities of producing things, and of accelerating their increase. But neither do the good angels do these things, except as far as God commands, nor do the evil ones do them wrongfully, except as far as He righteously permits. *On the Trinity*, 3.8.13.

⁸⁰ James Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 123. Augustine believed the good angels scatter the rational seeds in the elements and help to create the favorable conditions for their germination and

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Augustine's evolutionary theory was teleological and God-ordained and in that way differed from the evolutionary theory of random mutation and natural selection promoted by Darwin some fourteen centuries later. However, as McGrath has noted, "Augustine developed a theological framework that could accommodate this later scientific development."⁸¹

Metaphysics

A second and final consequence of Augustine's timeless view of Being is seen in his metaphysics, or the concept that holds all things together, which for Augustine is mystical participation⁸² in God. For Augustine, mutable things exist because there is an immutability in which all things participate.⁸³ This participation in God is expressed through the Platonic hierarchy of Being, where everything shares some likeness with the Supreme Good, which is God. In this way, Augustine's metaphysics is implicitly panentheistic.⁸⁴ Panentheistic participation occurs because God is the sovereign determinant of all things in the hierarchy of being, first spiritual beings, then bodily creatures, and finally lower inanimate beings at the bottom of the hierarchy.⁸⁵ For Augustine, Christ is above other men "not because he was the Truth in person, but on account of the

development. Thus, while not creators, they are secondary causes to God's primary creative act.

⁸¹ Alister McGrath, *The Passionate Intellect* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 145.

⁸² Mystical participation in God is ontological, panentheistic, and automatic. Biblical partaking of God is relational, voluntary, and involves the reflection of His image or mind (Rom. 12:1–2; 1 Cor 2:10–16; Phil 2:1–7; 1 Peter 4:1–2; Romans 15:5–6). The human is made in structural (psychophysical unity), relational, and functional/missional resemblance to God (see appendix A). Whether humans reflect God's image (instead of Satan's) hinges on exercising faith in God's words/promises—for it is through these that we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

⁸³ Kerbs, 371.

⁸⁴ The term *panenetheism* was coined by Karl Krause (1781–1832) but wasn't popularized until the mid-twentieth century. Hence while it is anachronistic to refer to anyone prior to that time as a panentheist, John Cooper believes the term "implicit panentheism" can apply to anyone whose ideology fits its description. He believes Neoplatonism is "the genuine fountainhead of classical panentheism" and qualifies Augustine under this terminology. He distinguishes five categories of qualification: implicit vs. explicit panentheism; personal vs. nonpersonal panentheism; part-whole vs. relational panentheism; voluntary and/or natural panentheism; and classical (divine determinist) or modern (cooperative) panentheism. John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 26–29.

⁸⁵ Augustine, *On the Trinity*. 3.2.7–8, 3.4.9.

outstanding excellence of his human nature and his more perfect participation in wisdom.”⁸⁶

Summary

Augustine believed Neoplatonism was perfectly compatible with Christianity and therefore he easily adopted the philosophical interpretation of Being (ontology) and God (theology) as timeless. In his interpretation of human nature (anthropology) Augustine likewise follows the Neoplatonic division of temporal body and immortal soul. Regarding knowledge (epistemology) Augustine sees an ascending order of mystical contemplation. The first involves the soul’s higher reason (which has a prior knowledge of timeless truths) and is thereby able to take the temporal wrapping of biblical words and abstract the timeless truth they contain. To extract the kernel of truth, Augustine refers to his “inner ear,” an embedded intuition whereby God speaks directly to the soul to correct the plain word of Scripture. For the next and greater stage of spiritual union with God the soul must rise above Scripture and cognition to contemplate God as He is, in one tremendous glance of pure light. Augustine’s cosmology accommodates progressive creationism through the rational seeds God implants in nature and which later evolve when God ordains into visible entities. This view is coherent with Augustine’s metaphysics which views all things as panentheistically participating, to a greater or lesser degree, in God’s immutability. This is accomplished through God’s sovereign will, which ultimately determines reality.

The Protestant Model: Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483–1540) is arguably the most renowned representative of the Protestant model of spirituality. Luther’s title as “the beacon of the Reformation” is well deserved by virtue of his militant boldness in confronting ecclesiological injustices, unmaking heresy, and spending his energies in the translation, interpretation, and propagation of God’s word. And yet while Luther upheld *sola Scriptura* in theory, in practice he was a man of his time and continued to be influenced by the macro-hermeneutical presuppositions undergirding the ideologies of his day.

⁸⁶ *Confessions*, 7. 19. 25. For Augustine, Christ’s earthly incarnation, life, and death add nothing to God’s reality or knowledge, Christ’s ministry only existed to assist human faith. See Kerbs, 381.

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For one, Luther's theology is significantly indebted to medieval mystical theology.⁸⁷ Scholars agree notable influence in this area was Pseudo-Dionysius, whose writings were a central part of "a serious monk's spiritual diet."⁸⁸ Luther read Pseudo-Dionysius "to the extent that he knew the Dionysian corpus (which is not very large, about 250 pages in a modern English translation) almost by heart."⁸⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius (c. 400s–500s) merged Christianity with Neoplatonism through his mystical theology.⁹⁰ Grounding himself on Platonic dualism, Pseudo-Dionysius defines mysticism (spirituality) as the union of the immortal soul with an immaterial timeless God⁹¹ through the way of unknowing (*via negativa*) that transcends all sensory-perception and cognition.⁹² His three stages of

⁸⁷ "The scholarship on Luther and mysticism is nearly endless and trying to master it can be overwhelming." Luther's practice of mystical union with God was inconsistent, although he mentions being "caught up in the third heaven" (2 Cor 12:2), another time he says he was drawn up among angelic choirs, and another having a vision of the crucified Christ. Roger K. Rittgers, "Martin Luther" in *Protestants and Mysticism in Reformation Europe*, eds. Ronald K. Rittgers and Vincent Evener (Boston, MA: Brill, 2019). Volker Leppin, "Luther's Mystical Roots" in *Martin Luther: A Christian Between Reforms and Modernity* (1517–2017), ed. Alberto Melloni (Boston, MA: Hubert & Co, 2017), 157.

⁸⁸ Karl Froehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century" in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 41. Luther's notes on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* mention Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* several times in a positive light. Also, in his first lecture on the Psalms Luther praised Pseudo-Dionysius, in particular his negative theology which he termed the "most perfect" theology in comparison to what he termed "babbling" scholastic theology. Yet by his second lecture on the Psalms he had begun to be critical of him stating "Dionysius is most pernicious; he Platonizes more than he Christianizes." Yet, even while rejecting aspects of Pseudo-Dionysius, Luther continued to be accepting of mystical theology in general, now mostly through Bernard of Clairvaux and Johannes Tauler. Leppin, 159–160 and Froehlich, 43–44.

⁸⁹ Knut Alfsvåg, "Luther as a Reader of Dionysius the Areopagite," *Studia Theologica* 65:2 (2011): 101–114, 2.

⁹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius (c. 500 AD) defined mystical theology as "symbols and ritual" that lead us beyond a cognitive relation to God to a real union with Him in the "truly mystic darkness of unknowing." Thus, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, mystical theology does not persuade us, it acts on us. See F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, eds. 3rd ed. rev. "Mysticism, Mystical Theology" *ODCC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1134.

⁹¹ The Supreme Cause "is not substance, nor is it eternity or time." *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 141.

⁹² To reach the immaterial timeless God one must abandon "everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge." *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 136, 139.

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mystical progression—purification, contemplation and union—climax in advanced contemplation where “the mind must be left behind” to go beyond sense perception.⁹³ For Pseudo-Dionysius, this is how Moses contemplated God on Sinai.⁹⁴

A second mystical influence on Luther was a volume he edited and endorsed entitled *Theologia Germanica*.⁹⁵ Luther claims that aside from Scripture and St. Augustine this book contained the highest wisdom concerning God, Christ, mankind, and all things.⁹⁶ In this writing, the author advocates moving beyond sensory things and even reason to enter into union with God through the power of the soul.⁹⁷ This extra-sensory, suprarational union occurs timelessly and allows the participant to enter into the mind of God.⁹⁸

⁹³ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo Dionysius, A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 191.

⁹⁴ On Sinai Moses “breaks free of them, away from what sees and is seen, and he plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing. Here, renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to him who is beyond everything. Here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 137.

⁹⁵ This volume is thought to have been written in the late fourteenth century by an anonymous author. Luther assumed the author to be John Tauler, an early fourteenth-century German mystic, Neoplatonist, and disciple of Meister Eckhart. Luther was so moved by the writing that he edited two editions, one in 1516 and another in 1518.

⁹⁶ In his 1518 edition Luther states “For this noble little book, poor and unadorned as it is as far as wording and purely human wisdom are concerned is all the richer and abundantly precious in true knowledge and divine wisdom. And, if I may speak with biblical foolishness: *Next to the Bible and Saint Augustine no other book has come to my attention from which I have learned—and desired to learn—more concerning God, Christ, man, and what all things are.*” *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. Bengt Hoffman (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980), 53–54.

⁹⁷ “It has been asked whether it be possible for the soul, while it is yet in the body, to reach so high as to cast a glance into eternity, and receive a foretaste of eternal life and eternal blessedness. This is commonly denied. . . . But St. Dionysius maintains it is possible.” Then quoting Dionysius: “For to behold the hidden things of God, you shall forsake sense and the things of the flesh, and all that the senses can apprehend, and that reason of her own powers can bring forth, and all things created and uncreated that reason is able to comprehend and know, and shall take your stand upon an utter abandonment of yourself. . . . and enter into union with Him who is, and who is above all existence and knowledge.” *Theologia Germanica*, trans. Susanna Winkworth (Mesa, AZ: Scriptoria, 2014), 11–12.

⁹⁸ The author explains that, just as Christ’s created soul had two eyes—a right for looking into eternity and a left eye for looking at things in time—so too man’s right eye

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A third influence on Augustine was William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347) who rejected the rational methodology (the abstraction of truth through higher reason seen in Augustine and later Aquinas) of the *via antiqua*, developing instead the faith-based, experiential *via moderna* of nominalism.⁹⁹ Ockham's voluntarism¹⁰⁰ and "razor" principle¹⁰¹ also exerted a profound influence on Luther's theology. A fourth and final influence on the Augustinian monk was none other than St. Augustine, whose writings Luther upheld as second only to Scripture.¹⁰²

Thus, although Luther may have verbally reviled philosophy¹⁰³ through Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Theologia Germanica*, Ockham, and

was the way in which his soul might look into timelessness to achieve union with God: "And as soon as a man turns himself in spirit, and with his whole heart and mind *enters into the mind of God which is above time*, all that ever he has lost is restored in a moment. And if a man were to do thus a thousand times in a day, each time a fresh and real union would take place; and in this sweet and divine work stands the truest and fullest union that may be in this present time. For he who has attained this, asks nothing further, for he has found the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal Life on earth." Ibid, 12. Italics mine.

⁹⁹ Ockham's nominalism drove a lasting wedge of opposition between faith and reason, so that from that point onwards, theology's "sola fideism" was generally viewed as a statement against human reason. Olson, 353.

¹⁰⁰ Ockham distinguished between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* (absolute and ordered power). God's absolute power is noted in the structure of universal laws, yet God is not bound to these. He has absolute power which is untamed and even irrational for humans, so much so, Ockham states, that God could have decided to be incarnated in a rock, a tree or a donkey. Olson, 354–355. We will see this played out in discussing Luther's view of the "hidden God." Biblically speaking, God's omnipotence reveals His absolute power (*potentia absoluta*), yet Scripture demonstrates that God uses His power within a designated order (*potentia ordinata*) of love, reason and truth (1 John 4:8; Isa 1:18, Titus 1:2 cf. Heb 6:18). In other words, God has bound Himself to His word/laws in the structure of universal laws, and He assures us of His constancy by stating that He immutably abides by this established order (Mal 3:6; James 1:17; Heb 13:8).

¹⁰¹ Ockham's razor was the term later used to designate Ockham's rule of parsimony, that is, the elimination of unnecessary entities. In Luther this will be noted in his reduction of Scripture to Justification by Faith, specifically the letter to the Romans, and the ontological reduction of God to the cross, specifically in the sacramental host that exemplified the Real Presence. Kerbs, 586; Bacchiocchi, 375–376.

¹⁰² See A. G. Dickens, *Martin Luther and the Reformation* (New York, NY: 1967), 22–31; Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation* (New York, NY: 1966), 127; Daniel Day Williams, "The Significance of St. Augustine Today," in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (Grand Rapids, MI: 1979), 3–5; and Patricia Wilson-Kastner, "On Partaking of the Divine Nature: Luther's Dependence on Augustine," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 22:1 (Spring 1984).

¹⁰³ Indeed I believe that I owe to the Lord this duty of crying out against philosophy and turning men to Holy Scripture. . . ." LW, XV, 236; "Reason [i.e. philosophy] is the Devil's greatest whore; by nature and manner of being she is a noxious whore; she is a

Augustine,¹⁰⁴ he nonetheless adopted the standard philosophical view of Being as timeless.¹⁰⁵

Interpretation of God's Being

Because, like a domino effect, Being determines the other macro-hermeneutical areas, Luther's view of God is likewise timeless. God knows all temporal events instantaneously and simultaneously.¹⁰⁶ Luther explains,

For God does not see time longitudinally; He sees it transversely, as if you were looking transversely at a tall tree lying before you. Then you can see both ends at the same time. This you cannot do if you look at it longitudinally. With our reason we cannot look at time in any other way than longitudinally. Beginning with Adam, we must count one year after the other until the Last Day. But in God's sight everything is in one heap. What is long for us is short for Him and vice versa. Here there is neither measure nor number.¹⁰⁷

prostitute, the Devil's appointed whore, whore eaten by scab and leprosy who ought to be trodden underfoot and destroyed, she and her wisdom. . . Throw dung in her face to make her ugly. She is and she ought to be drowned in baptism." *LW* XVI, 142–148.

¹⁰⁴ Luther held that the theology of the entire church (not just Augustine) was "authentic" until 1,100 AD, at which point the church came under a "Babylonian captivity" for 400 years through certain church excesses, such as indulgences and the claim of papal infallibility. Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World*, (New York, NY: Viking, 2017), 167, 169.

¹⁰⁵ Raul Kerbs notes "in proposing a pedagogical order that goes from the church fathers to the Scriptures, rather than a critical order that goes from the Scriptures to the church fathers, Luther fails to see that through the church fathers he is adopting the philosophical interpretation of the presuppositions of the mind." *El Problema De La Identidad Biblica Del Cristianismo: Las Presuposiciones Filosoficas de la Teologia Cristiana: Desde Los Presocraticos al Protestantismo*, (Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2014), 575, my translation. Bruce McCormack has likewise noted that "the Reformers" refusal to engage directly issues of theological ontology made them blind to the extent to which they continued to subscribe to ontological assumptions which could, logically, *only fund a Catholic ordering of regeneration and justification*." "What's at Stake in Current Debates over Justification?" in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands, and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 84, emphasis original. See also Canale, *Secular Adventism?*, 38–40.

¹⁰⁶ Kerbs, 575.

¹⁰⁷ "The Catholic Epistles" in *Luther's Works (LW)*, 55 vols., ed Jaroslav Pelikan et al. (St. Louis, MO/Philadelphia, PA: Concordia Publishing House, Fortress Press, 1958–1986), 30: 196.

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Because God is timeless and humans exist in time, Luther affirms the two-world dichotomy of Neoplatonism establishing a timeless heavenly world and an earthly temporal world.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, the separation between God's timelessness and human temporality means that, like Augustine, Luther separates what God is "in himself" (timeless and hidden) from what He is "for us" (temporal revelation seen in works and darkness). Here is where the Neoplatonic/Dionysian *via negativa* enters. Because God cannot truly reveal himself, He presents two personas or faces, namely, a revealed God and a mysterious hidden God. The revealed God is seen in the gospel of grace exemplified in the teachings of Jesus. This is all we should proclaim and concern ourselves with.¹⁰⁹ The hidden God is a dark, mysterious and omnipotent God who is the first cause of everything that happens in history, even the devil and sin.¹¹⁰ This hidden God is the basis for Luther's view of double predestination where God has two wills: a revealed gospel will for the salvation of those elected in Christ, and a hidden dark will that predestines everyone else as instruments of evil and condemnation.¹¹¹ It is not that God foresees future human actions and predestines accordingly, God arbitrarily decides who will be saved and who damned.¹¹²

Interpretation of Human Nature

The timeless view of Being also determines Luther's interpretation of human nature,¹¹³ which he views as composed of a temporal body and a timeless soul that leaves the body at death.¹¹⁴ This body-spirit dualism is

¹⁰⁸ *LW*, 26: 8; 30:196.

¹⁰⁹ Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 388.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 388.

¹¹¹ Luther takes his voluntarism from the philosophy of William of Ockham who distinguished two powers in God: *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*—God's absolute power (hidden timeless will) and His ordered power (revealed will in nature). Anything God does is necessarily good, not because there is any inherent goodness in it, but because God wills it. There is no immutable goodness in God, only His unrestricted suprarational will. It is in this same way that Luther interprets God's omnipotence. Olson, 354–355.

¹¹² *LW*, 33: 37.

¹¹³ Luther interpretation here is inconsistent, while at times he appears to advocate for a holistic view of man as a union of spirit and body that makes up the soul, his more numerous statements on the dualism of body and soul establish his interpretation as the traditional view of man as comprised of a temporal body and timeless soul. See Kerbs, 593–594.

¹¹⁴ Luther affirms that at death the soul departs from the body: "If God looks upon you, all the angels, saints, and all creatures will fix their eyes upon you. And if you remain

then reflected in Luther's reason-faith opposition.¹¹⁵ While Augustine believed man's higher reason to be the function of the illumined soul, which enabled it to see the beatific vision, Luther links human reason not with the soul, but with man's physical and fleshy nature. Luther's hatred of Aristotle's philosophy¹¹⁶ results in his rejection of reason in general, which he terms that "great whore."¹¹⁷ Luther's opposition between reason and faith, results in a theology that scholars have often viewed as "incoherent" and "paradoxical."¹¹⁸ In effect, Luther's view of faith is the non-cognitive (suprarational) equivalent of Augustine's cognitive abstraction: both providing a timeless means for humans to reach timeless truth (God).¹¹⁹ Thus, while the reason of the flesh/body deals with the temporal sphere, the faith of the soul focuses on the future timeless realm,

in that faith, all of them will uphold you with their hands. And *when your soul leaves your body*, they will be on hand to receive it, and you cannot perish" *LW* 42: 112, my italics. The immortal soul is also sensorial: "It's true that souls hear, feel, and see after death, but how this occurs we don't understand." 54: 446–447. Speaking of Eccl 3:20 where Scripture says men return to dust, Luther argues that this should not be "twisted to refer to the mortality of the soul." *LW*, 15: 60. There are some, such as Jürgen Moltmann, who maintain that Luther advocates soul sleep. *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, eds. John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), 248–249. However, "soul sleep" for Luther is a living sleep: "it is certain that the souls [of the dead] are living and are in peace." He continues noting the difference between physical sleep and soul sleep, saying the former "has no knowledge whatever [. . .] But the soul does not sleep in the same manner. It is awake. It experiences visions and the discourses of the angels and of God. [. . .] God preserves the waking soul." Thus, Luther sees the soul as immortal, and soul sleep as "deeper" than physical sleep, for in it the soul is able to communicate with God. *LW*, 4:313.

¹¹⁵ For example, Luther states that the immortality of the soul cannot be understood by earthly men, but only by the sons of God who belong to heaven. *LW*, 15: 60. Here we also note how Luther's body-soul dichotomy is reflected in a similar reason-faith opposition, where the immortality of the soul cannot be ascertained by human reason, but only through the gift of divine faith given to the elect.

¹¹⁶ In keeping with the Neoplatonism of his mentors (Augustine and the author of *Theologia Germanica*), Luther is more sympathetic with Plato, finding him closer to Scripture: "It seems that perhaps in Egypt Plato picked up a few sparks of thought, seemingly from the discourses of the patriarchs and the prophets, and for this reason came closer to the truth." *LW*, 1:4.

¹¹⁷ "[In Luther] reason becomes a wisdom of the flesh that stands in opposition to God; and that fleshy wisdom is philosophy. Behind philosophy, the devil's horns can be detected, for he is always at play, tempting some unwitting soul with his harlot." Kerbs, 569, my translation.

¹¹⁸ Olson, 386–387.

¹¹⁹ Kerbs, 592.

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essentially negating the past-present-future scope of redemption history.¹²⁰ Ultimately for Luther faith has nothing to do with what is visible or taught in the revealed Word, instead it deals with invisible things in the timeless realm, specifically union with God.

Cosmology

In keeping with his faith-reason dichotomy, Luther says that even though it is incomprehensible, we must by faith accept the six-day creation narrative in Genesis.¹²¹ However, a consistent reading of this account would uphold the seventh day as uniquely blessed by God above the rest. Instead, Luther posits that humans need just one day of rest, and that any day will do.¹²² Furthermore, Luther's two-world cosmology results in the eschatological elimination of the earthly realm in preference for the heavenly realm of timelessness.¹²³ This negates God's sequential creation as a changeless divine order that was upheld on this earth by the prophets and Christ,¹²⁴ and will be retained in the future life.¹²⁵

Union with God

Luther believed the union with God was affected through faith in the eucharistic words of institution ("this is my body"). In the debates with Zwingli, which revolved around the interpretation of Christ's words of institution, Luther fought to establish the real/physical presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the process Luther articulated his Christ-centered

¹²⁰ Kerbs, 591.

¹²¹ "Therefore, so far as this opinion of Augustine is concerned, we assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively, i.e., that the world, with all its creatures, was created within six days, as the words read. If we do not comprehend the reason for this, let us remain pupils and leave the job of teacher to the Holy Spirit." *LW*, 1:5.

¹²² "It is not necessary to observe the sabbath [sic] or Sunday because of Moses' commandment. Nature also shows and teaches that one must now and then rest a day, so that man and beast may be refreshed [. . .] it is clear that he who does not need rest may break the sabbath [sic] and rest on some other day, as nature allows." *LW*, 40: 98.

¹²³ Luther explains, "Here everything goes by number: hours, days, and years in succession. Now when you want to look at the life to come, you must erase the course of this life from your mind. You dare not think that you can measure it as this life is measured. There everything will be one day, one hour, one moment." *LW*, 30: 196.

¹²⁴ Exod 16:4, 23–29; 20:11; 31:17, Isa 56:6, 7, Mark 2:27, 28, Luke 4:16; John 15:10.

¹²⁵ Isa 66:23.

panentheism,¹²⁶ explaining that Christ's body is physically and substantially present in *all earthly matter*.¹²⁷ Yet he urges believers not to look for Christ in nature (though He is corporally present there), but only in *Christ's words of institution* spoken at the mass. This is where salvific human faith must be exercised. For it is faith in these four words that provides the means to union with God.¹²⁸

Luther explains: "Thus the sacrament is for us a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher, by which and in which we pass from this world into eternal life. Therefore, everything depends on faith."¹²⁹ When this faith is exercised the believer unites with God and becomes "a new man in a new world where there is no Law, no sin, no conscience, no death, but perfect joy, righteousness, grace, peace life, salvation and glory."¹³⁰ It is through the eating of Christ's body—while exercising faith in the promise/word—that union and salvation is affected:

¹²⁶ As with Augustine, the term "implicit panentheism" can apply to anyone whose ideology fits its description. See Cooper, *Panentheism*, 26–30.

¹²⁷ Luther references Eph 4:22: "He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things." Luther then argues "not only according to his divine nature, but also *according to his human nature*, he is lord of all things, has all things in his hand, and *is present everywhere* [. . .] *Christ is all around us and in us in all places* [. . .] he is *present in all creatures*, and I might find him *in stone, in fire, in water, or even in a rope*, for he certainly is there, yet he does not wish that I seek him there apart from the Word, and cast myself into the fire or the water, or hang myself on the rope. He is present everywhere, but he does not wish that you grope for him everywhere. Grope rather where the Word is, and there you will lay hold of him in the right way." *LW*, 36: 342. My italics. Luther also underscored the material omnipresence of Christ: "Heaven and earth are his sack; as wheat fills the sack, so *he fills all things*. And as a seed bears a stalk, an ear, and many kernels [. . .] much more is *Christ able to distribute himself whole and undivided into so many particles*. *LW*, 36: 343. My italics. Two years later (1528), after more rebuttals from Zwingli, Luther further detailed his Christ-centered Panentheism specifying three modes for Christ's omnipresence: circumscribed, uncircumscribed and replete. See Bacchiocchi, "Luther in the Eucharistic Debates: *Sola Scriptura* or the Divinization of Man?" in *Scripture and Philosophy: Essays Honoring the Work and Vision of Fernando Luis Canale*, eds. Tiago Arrais, Kenneth Bergland, and Michael F. Younker, (Berrien Springs, MI: Lithotech, 2016), 371–372.

¹²⁸ For Luther everything depended on the word *is* in "this *is* my body," to change it to *signifies* "opens a soteriological distance between Christ and the communicant that contradicts the promise of the words of institution. . . [the eucharist] is the saving function of the sacrament together with the word of God." Hans-Martin Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther: A Critical Assessment* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 238. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁹ *LW*, 35: 66.

¹³⁰ *LW*, 26: 8.

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The heart cannot eat it physically nor can the mouth eat it spiritually. So God arranges that the mouth eats physically for the heart and the heart eats spiritually for the mouth, and thus *both are satisfied and saved by one and the same food* . . . Perishable food is transformed into the body which eats it: this food, however transforms the person who eats it into what it is itself and makes him like itself, spiritual, alive, and eternal. . . So, when we eat Christ's flesh physically and spiritually, *the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshy sinful, mortal men makes spiritual, holy, living men*.¹³¹

The "Word of God" for Luther was not a rational revelation of God in Scripture (for Luther had repudiated the rational methodology of the *via antiqua*, adopting in its place the faith-based, experiential *via moderna* of Ockham's nominalism). Instead, the Word of God for Luther boiled down to Christ's commands—first baptism and thereafter the eucharist—that connected us mystically with Him.

Metaphysics

Ultimately, what holds all things together in Luther's view is God's sovereign and timeless will in establishing the salvation of the elect and the condemnation of the reprobate—Luther's double predestination.¹³² While Luther focuses on the revealed God and His *revealed will* (the gospel of justification by faith for the elect) Luther's less prominent hidden God is the one whose sovereign and inscrutable will must not be questioned, but adored.¹³³ God's double predestination thus becomes the timeless metaphysical principle of immutable unity before which historical time is secondary and relatively inconsequential. All that matters in Luther's system is God's sovereign will,¹³⁴ to the utter denial of human freedom.¹³⁵ "In effect, just as the conversion of the bread and wine into the

¹³¹ *LW* 37:93; 37:87.

¹³² "God's love toward men is eternal and immutable, and his hatred is eternal, being prior to the creation of the world, and not only to the merit and work of free choice; and everything takes place by necessity in us, according as he either loves or does not love us from all eternity." *LW*, 33: 199. See also Kerbs, 589–590.

¹³³ "We must not ask the reason for the divine will, but simply adore it." *LW*, 33: 61.

¹³⁴ "God does not lie, but does all things immutably, and that his will can neither be resisted nor changed nor hindered." *LW*, 33: 43.

¹³⁵ "Everything that happens, even if it seems to us to happen mutably and contingently, happens in fact nonetheless necessarily and immutably, if you have regard to the will of God. For the will of God is effectual and cannot be hindered, since it is the power of the divine nature itself." *LW*, 33: 37–38. "Compelled by inescapable logic [we

body and blood [of Christ] is the work of divine omnipotence before which man is passive, the entire work of salvation is the product of the same omnipotence, before which man is passive.”¹³⁶

Summary

Although Luther upheld selected portions of Scripture, he nonetheless adopted the underlying philosophical hermeneutics of the church fathers (such as Augustine) and other early mystical influences (such as Pseudo Dionysius and the *Theologia Germanica*).¹³⁷ Luther’s philosophical interpretation was noted in his view of God as timeless, his understanding of humans as a body-spirit dualism, and finally in spirituality (the union of the divine subject with the human subject) as a non-cognitive or suprarational act, where faith in God’s timeless words (*hoc est corpus meum*) effects God’s real presence and confirms salvation. It was also noted that Luther’s metaphysics—the relation of the parts with the whole—centered on God’s sovereign and timeless will of double predestination (salvation for some, damnation for the rest), which must not be questioned but only adored. Regarding Luther’s cosmology we noted that while he accepts the seven-day creation, he does not believe in a special seventh-day blessing either for this world or the next.

The Modern Model: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Cosmology¹³⁸

Seeking to integrate the doctrine of evolution with Christianity, Teilhard (1881–1955) accommodates the concept of a creation within evolution. Instead of God’s intentional seven-day creation account in Scripture, Teilhard declares that the earth arose through some

must] admit that just as we do not come into being by our own will, but by necessity, so we do not do anything by right of free choice, but as God has foreknown and as he leads us to act by his infallible and immutable counsel and power.” *LW*, 33: 191.

¹³⁶ Kerbs, 592. My translation.

¹³⁷ Luther’s endorsement of Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius does not encompass all they wrote, but primarily the adoption of their macro-hermeneutical presuppositions (the *via negativa*, God’s timelessness, dual human nature, and a suprarational faith). At the meso and micro hermeneutical areas Luther could be critical. Among other things, Luther disagreed with Augustine on ecclesiology, the sacraments, and purgatory. For Luther’s critique of Pseudo Dionysius see Knut Alfsvåg, “Luther as a Reader of Dionysius the Areopagite,” *Studia Theologica* 65:2 (2011): 101–114.

¹³⁸ I start the study of Teilhard’s macro-hermeneutical structure looking at his cosmology rather than Being or God (as done with Augustine and Luther) because, as a theistic evolutionist, his cosmic vision largely determines the other categories.

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“unbelievable accident” millions of billions of years ago.¹³⁹ Yet once chance had unleashed this accidental genesis, God (or intuition)¹⁴⁰ jumped in to direct evolution (orthogenesis).¹⁴¹ Teilhard explains the ensuing theistic evolution in terms of panentheism, “to create is for God to unite. To unite, to form one with something, is to be immersed in it; but to be immersed (in the plural) is to become a particle within it.”¹⁴² Moreover, Teilhard sees evil as an integral and necessary part of the evolutionary ascent: “at every degree of evolution, we find evil always and everywhere, forming and reforming implacably in us and around us [. . .] evil appears necessarily and as abundantly as you like in the course of evolution—not by accident [. . .] but through the very structure of the system.”¹⁴³ Thus, instead of the biblical system where God creates everything good (and degeneration occurs only through sin), the structure of Teilhard’s cosmological system not only makes God responsible for evil, it also—in defining evil as the formative and reformatory quality in humans—redefines evil as good, even divine. In other words, evil propels the divine engine of orthogenesis, so that all things—even error, darkness, and evil—must be viewed as sacred. And this “truth” is arrived at only by faith.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ “Some thousands of millions of years ago, not it would appear, by a regular process of astral evolution, but as *the result of some unbelievable accident* (a brush with another star? An internal upheaval?) a fragment of matter composed of particularly stable atoms was detached from the surface of the sun. . . [thus] another heavenly body—a planet this time—had been born.” *The Phenomenon of Man*, 67. Italics mine.

¹⁴⁰ “In every domain, when anything exceeds a certain measurement, it suddenly changes its aspect, condition or nature. The curve doubles back, the surface contracts to a point, the solid disintegrates, the liquid boils, the germ cell divides, *intuition suddenly bursts* on the piled up facts. . .” *The Phenomenon of Man*, 78. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴¹ “The earth was probably born by accident; but, in accordance with one of the most general laws of evolution, *scarcely had this accident happened than it was immediately made use of and recast into something naturally directed.*” *The Phenomenon of Man*, 74. Italics mine. Orthogenesis is the structural spine of Teilhard’s vision of reality, namely, his teleological orientation of all things towards a final Omega point. Its direction, as we will see in the next section, is Cosmogeneration→Biogenesis→Noogenesis→Christogenesis→Omega Point (Pleroma).

¹⁴² Quoted in McCarty, 47.

¹⁴³ *The Phenomenon of Man*, 312–313.

¹⁴⁴ *The Divine Milieu*, 30, 65. Like Augustine and Luther, Teilhard believes that through persistent faith we can be assured that God is concealed in darkness: “the unleashing of dark moral forces” that terrify us, “in truth, the huge and dark thing, the phantom, the storm—if we want it to be so, is you! [. . .] We have only to believe. And the more threatening and irreducibly reality appears, the more firmly and desperately must we believe. Then, little by little, we shall see the universal horror unbend, and then smile on us, and then take us in its more than human arms.” *Ibid.*, 112.

Interpretation of Human Nature

Because of his religious conviction in evolution, Teilhard builds his mystical theology around man: "I have chosen man as the centre, and around him I have tried to establish a coherent order between antecedents and consequents."¹⁴⁵ Teilhard sees human nature (and all matter) as having two types of energy: (1) an external energy which is the subject of science and (2) an internal energy which he terms *spiritual or psychic* energy, which is "the object of a direct intuition and the substance of all knowledge."¹⁴⁶ Thus we see that Teilhard views man as the traditional philosophical dualism of an external body and an internal soul (or psychic energy), which is immortal.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, Teilhard sees the evolution of man as a process of divine immersion¹⁴⁸ occurring over four continuing stages, each called a "genesis": (1) *cosmogenesis*, emergence of primal matter some fifteen billion years ago; (2) *biogenesis*, emergence of life occurring some two billion years ago; (3) *noogenesis*, the appearance of thought making primal man human, occurring about million years ago; and (4) *Christogenesis* when the historical Jesus is incarnated,¹⁴⁹ unleashing a process of Christ consciousness which will end in the Omega Point and final exit¹⁵⁰ of

¹⁴⁵ "All science must be referred back to him." *The Phenomenon of Man*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002), 29. While traditional theology begins with the doctrine of God and revelation and then proceeds to understand the world and man "Teilhard begins with the artifacts of the world, develops an anthropology, and then a cosmic picture. . . Teilhard starts with the empirical data and shows how there is a mystery within this data which holds it all together." McCarty, 54.

¹⁴⁶ *The Phenomenon of Man*, 55.

¹⁴⁷ Teilhard's friend and advocate, Henri de Lubac, notes that "the entire work of Pere Teilhard de Chardin can be regarded as one vast proof—renewed in a scientific perspective—for the immortality of the human soul and the existence of God." *Teilhard Explained*, 41.

¹⁴⁸ God guides the evolutionary ascent "by partially immersing himself in things, by becoming 'element' and then, from this point of vantage in the heart of matter, assuming the control and leadership of what we now call evolution." *The Phenomenon of Man*, 293–294.

¹⁴⁹ Ronald J. Wilkins, *The Emerging Church: The Story of the Roman Catholic Church from Its Beginnings to the Present* (Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown Pub., 1981), 209.

¹⁵⁰ This final step requires the "breaking away of [the soul] from its temporo-spatial frame to join up with the supreme and universal focus Omega." Ibid, 309. Raul Kerbs defines Teilhard's Parousia as an "exit" that goes beyond space, time and matter into the final convergence. At the final end of the Omega point, matter, space and time are overcome, so that the spirit may exist without those "limitations." Kerbs interprets this as the classic "visio Dei" or vision of God in timelessness, only interpreted in evolutionary

humanity into the timeless and immaterial realm of God. In this we see that Teilhard holds to the traditional Platonic two-world cosmology, in which matter and time must be ultimately overcome by spirit and timelessness.

Interpretation of God

Teilhard believes God guides the evolutionary ascent “by partially immersing himself in things, by becoming ‘element’ and then, from this point of vantage in the heart of matter, assuming the control and leadership of what we now call evolution.”¹⁵¹ This form of theistic evolution is essentially panentheism, in which God is “partially” immersed in temporal matter, yet transcends timelessly above it.¹⁵² In other words, Teilhard adopts the traditional interpretation of God (and Being) as immaterial and timeless.¹⁵³ However, in divinizing matter (particularly through the incarnation, baptism, and passion of Christ) Teilhard holds that the entire universe is the body of God.¹⁵⁴ Thus, Teilhard interprets God

perspective, which Teilhard extends beyond what current science would deem scientific. This is because Teilhard seeks to reinterpret and ground the classical view of the immortality of the soul after death through the concept of a growing spiritualization that ends suppressing or overcoming the world of space, time and matter. *El Problema De La Identidad Biblica Del Cristianismo: Las Presuposiciones Filosoficas de la Teologia Cristiana: Desde la Reforma al Presente*. (Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, forthcoming).

¹⁵¹ *The Phenomenon of Man*, 293–294.

¹⁵² Teilhard notes that the world is not “one with God” by identification (God becoming all) but by differentiation “(God all in everyone).” *Phenomenon of Man*, 310. Italics original.

¹⁵³ It is important to note that the Christ of Teilhard bears little resemblance to the Jesus of Scripture, whom Teilhard disdainfully dismisses in preference for a super-animating cosmic Christ. Teilhard sees Jesus of Galilee as “only a man” and “an equal.” Directing himself in prayer to God he states, “Sometimes people think that they can increase your attraction in my eyes by stressing almost exclusively the charm and goodness of your human life in the past. But truly, O Lord, if I wanted to cherish only a man, then I would surely turn to those whom you have given me in the allurements of their present flowering. Are there not. . . enough irresistibly lovable people around us? Why should we turn to Judeaea two thousand years ago? No, what I cry out for. . . is something very different from an equal to cherish: it is a God to adore.” *The Divine Milieu*, 101.

¹⁵⁴ Teilhard prays, “Grant, Lord, that your descent into the universal Species may not be for me just something loved and cherished. . . but may become for me truly a real Presence. Whether we like it or not by power and by right you are incarnate in the world, and we are all of us dependent upon you. . . If I firmly believe that everything around me is the body and blood of the Word, then for me. . . is brought about that marvelous ‘diaphany.’” *Hymn of the Universe*, 21–22. “At the inception of the [incarnation] there had to be a transcendent act which, in accordance with mysterious but physically regulated

pantheistically, as having an immanent spatio-temporal body (the world), while still retaining the traditional interpretation of God as a timeless, immaterial, transcendent Spirit.

God as transcendent Spirit emerges when Teilhard discusses the Omega point—the “Soul of souls”—which gathers up all time and space in order escape time and space.¹⁵⁵ Throughout history, humans individually unite with Omega upon their deaths,¹⁵⁶ yet there will be a final moment at the end of time—when all things will converge timelessly into Omega so that Christ may be “all in all.”¹⁵⁷

Role of Scripture

Teilhard announces, at the very outset of *The Phenomenon of Man*, that his theology is not built on supernatural revelation but on natural man—man as interpreted through the scientific lens of evolution.¹⁵⁸ In other words, Teilhard observes man as a phenomenon of evolution and from there seeks to accommodate the concept of Christianity. Next, like Augustine and Luther, Teilhard interprets Christianity supranaturally, that is, through the ability of the timeless soul (*psyche*) to intuit timeless truth,¹⁵⁹ and this is the way that Teilhard then reads Scripture. Because Teilhard’s aim is to reconcile faith and science, he selects biblical texts that can easily be accommodated with his theistic evolution. These are the following: Eph 4:9 (used to support the panentheistic descent of God into matter), Col 1:17, 18; 2:10 (interpreted to imply that the world is the physical body of God, and Christ its head), and Col 2:10 (“Christ is all and

conditions, should graft the person of a God into the human cosmos. *Hymn of the Universe*, trans. Gerald Vann (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1969), 149–150.

¹⁵⁵ *The Divine Milieu*, 270–271.

¹⁵⁶ “All round us, one by one, like a continual exhalation, ‘souls’ break away [from their dead bodies], carrying upwards their incommunicable load of consciousness” to Omega. *The Divine Milieu*, 272.

¹⁵⁷ “Christ, principle of universal vitality because sprung up as man among men, put himself in the position (maintained ever since) to subdue under himself, to purify, direct, and superanimate the general ascent of consciousness into which he inserted himself. . . . And when he has gathered everything together and transformed everything, he will close in upon himself and his conquests, thereby rejoining. . . . the divine focus he has never left. Then. . . . God shall be all in all.” *Phenomenon of Man*, 309–310.

¹⁵⁸ *The Phenomenon of Man*, 29, 33.

¹⁵⁹ For the *psyche* is “the object of a direct intuition and the substance of all knowledge. *The Phenomenon of Man*, 55. Thus, like Augustine, who must tune his soul’s “inner ear” to hear God’s interpretation of Scripture, Teilhard counsels his readers to “focus [their] *soul’s eyes*” in order to see God everywhere. *The Divine Milieu*, 9. Italics mine.

in all,” which Teilhard uses to endorse panentheistic evolution).¹⁶⁰ Besides exercising faith in the unique interpretation of these select texts of Scripture, Teilhard clings to Christ’s words—“This is my body”—in Matt 26:26, Mark 14:22, and Luke 22:19 as the nucleus of Scripture and fountain of grace. For it is these words that both reveal Christ and operate salvation. Teilhard prays, “Teach me to adore [the world] by seeing you concealed within it, O Lord, repeat to me the great liberating words, the words which at once reveal and operate: *Hoc est Corpus meum*.”¹⁶¹ Thus we see that Teilhard’s use of Scripture is highly selective, interpreted through the intuitive power of the immortal soul, and guided by the aim of reconciling Christianity with theistic evolution.

Union with God: Completing the Incarnation

From the perspective that God did not enter the world through the historical Christ (as in Scripture), but through His immersion into every molecule of the material world, union with God seems to be a given. But this immersion was only the beginning of an incarnation that is to be completed by humans.¹⁶² After Christ’s incarnation, all matter became deified and it is through faith in this deification of matter (supported by the previously mentioned biblical texts) that humans may complete the incarnation of God.

Teilhard distinguishes two ways in which humans are deified or enter into “mystical union”¹⁶³ to complete the incarnation. First, humans complete the incarnation through the “divinization of activity.” All human action, Teilhard states, participates in the creative power of God and perfecting of Christ.¹⁶⁴ Thus, not only noble actions perfect Christ, but rather “*whatever we do*”¹⁶⁵ serves to fulfill our being and Christ’s being: “*nothing* here below is *profane* for those who know how to see. On the

¹⁶⁰ McCarty, 99.

¹⁶¹ *The Divine Milieu*, 112.

¹⁶² Teilhard explains, “the incarnation [of Christ] will be complete only when the part of chosen substance contained in every object—given spiritual import once in our souls and a second time with our souls in Jesus—shall have rejoined the final centre of its completion. . . It is through the collaboration which he stimulates in us that Christ, starting from all created things, is consummated and attains his plenitude.” *The Divine Milieu*, 25.

¹⁶³ *The Divine Milieu*, 21.

¹⁶⁴ *The Divine Milieu*, 26.

¹⁶⁵ *The Divine Milieu*, 26. Emphasis original.

contrary, everything is sacred.”¹⁶⁶ Secondly, humans complete Christ’s incarnation through the “divinization of passivity,” which Teilhard defines as things that happen to humans, such as illness and aging. Even moral weakness deifies, for God is in every thing and every act.¹⁶⁷ Finally death, which Teilhard defines as “evil itself,”¹⁶⁸ also contains God (“The Master of death”¹⁶⁹), because it is through death that God “will make us undergo the required dissociation [that we may] become fullness and unity in God.”¹⁷⁰ An event in which man will exit time and space in order to become fully one with God.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ *The Divine Milieu*, 30. Emphasis original. Elsewhere Teilhard adds, “the effort of mankind, even in realms inaccurately called profane, must, in the christian [sic] life, assume the role of a holy and unifying operation.” Ibid., 65.

¹⁶⁷ “The more deeply and incurably the evil is encrusted in my flesh, the more it will be you that I am harboring.” *The Divine Milieu*, 57.

¹⁶⁸ For Teilhard, evil is an integral and necessary part of the evolutionary ascent—it forms and reforms humans: “at every degree of evolution, we find evil always and everywhere, forming and reforming implacably in us and around us [. . .] evil appears necessarily and as abundantly as you like in the course of evolution—not by accident [. . .] but through the very structure of the system.” *The Phenomenon of Man*, 312–313. Not only does Teilhard make God responsible for evil, but in making evil the reforming quality in humans he redefines evil as good, even divine. In other words, even the profane is sacred. *The Divine Milieu*, 30, 65.

¹⁶⁹ *The Divine Milieu*, 48, 67. It is interesting that Satan and sin are not mentioned, instead God is the origin of all weaknesses and failings, both physical and moral. However, Teilhard later refers to “the powers of evil” stating that “in the course of the spiritual evolution of the world, certain conscious elements in it, certain monads, deliberately detached themselves from the mass that is stimulated by your [God’s] attraction” (Ibid, 124). Yet it is possible that God, through the process of orthogenesis, directed these monads to deliberately detach, since, in the end, Teilhard believes evil to be a necessary and reforming part of the evolutionary incarnation (*The Phenomenon of Man*, 312–313). Also, Teilhard believes God has “forbidden” him to hold that anyone will be damned. Thus, he concludes *The Divine Milieu* by offering a prayer that all will be saved. *The Divine Milieu*, 126–127.

¹⁷⁰ *The Divine Milieu*, 56.

¹⁷¹ Raul Kerbs defines Teilhard’s Parousia as an “exit” that goes beyond space, time and matter into the final convergence. At the final end of the Omega point, matter, space and time are overcome, so that the spirit may exist without those “limitations.” Kerbs interprets this as the classic “visio Dei” or vision of God in timelessness, only interpreted evolutionary perspective, which Teilhard extends beyond what current science would deem scientific. This is because Teilhard seeks to reinterpret and ground the classical view of the immortality of the soul after death through the concept of a growing spiritualization that ends suppressing or overcoming the world of space, time and matter. *El Problema De La Identidad Biblica Del Cristianismo: Las Presuposiciones Filosoficas de la Teologia Cristiana: Desde la Reforma al Presente*. (Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, forthcoming).

This way of seeing the world—through the divinization of human activity and passivity—is what Teilhard calls the upward climb to the “highest possible spiritualization.”¹⁷² But this mode of seeing is achievable only by faith: “The mystery will be accomplished. But on one condition: which is that *we shall believe* that *this* [the incarnate Word] has the will and the power to become for us the action—that is to say the prolongation of the Body of Christ.”¹⁷³

Metaphysics

Teilhardian metaphysics centers on the eucharistic Christ¹⁷⁴ as agent for the cosmic incarnation and transubstantiation. Just as Luther’s sacramental theology teaches that Christ’s physical body was infused in the material realm (panentheism),¹⁷⁵ Teilhard likewise posits that the world is the body of Christ.¹⁷⁶ And as the world evolves and grows through human actions, the incarnation of Christ into the world evolves and grows.¹⁷⁷ Teilhard states that while this approach may seem overly

¹⁷² *The Divine Milieu*, 71.

¹⁷³ *The Divine Milieu*, 111. Emphasis original.

¹⁷⁴ Teilhard asks, “What is . . . the concrete link which binds all these universal entities together and confers on them the final power of gaining hold of us? The essence of Christianity consists in asking oneself that question, and in answering: ‘The Word incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ.’” *The Divine Milieu*, 94.

¹⁷⁵ For Luther, this Christological immersion in matter occurred after Christ’s ascension. *LW*, 36: 342.

¹⁷⁶ For Teilhard, Christ’s immersion in matter—transforming it into the “mystical body of Christ”—occurred at His baptism: “Who can fail to perceive the great symbolic gesture of baptism in this general history of matter? Christ immerses himself in the waters of Jordan, symbol of the forces of the earth. These he sanctifies. And as he emerges . . . he elevates the whole world. Immersion and emergence; participation in things and sublimation.” Teilhard then elevates a prayer to matter, “Matter, you in whom I find both seduction and strength. . . I surrender myself to your mighty layers, with faith in the heavenly influences which have sweetened and purified your waters. *The virtue of Christ has passed on to you.*” *The Divine Milieu*, 80–81. Italics original. Teilhard also mentions the birth of Christ and His passion as moments in which Christ became incarnate into the world. *Hymn of the Universe*, 21–22; 149–150.

¹⁷⁷ *The Divine Milieu*, 25. Teilhard prays, “Grant, O God, that when I draw near to the altar to communicate, I may henceforth discern the infinite perspectives hidden beneath the smallness and the nearness of the Host in which you are concealed. I have already accustomed myself to seeing, beneath the stillness of that piece of bread, a devouring power which, in the words of the greatest doctors of your Church, far from being consumed by me, consumes me.” Ibid, 99. Harvey Egan notes that “the divine milieu takes on the human-divine face of Jesus. Just as Christ said ‘this is my body and blood’ over the eucharistic bread and wine, Teilhard sees the entire evolutionary process as a cosmic communion. One can find Christ in all things because all things are in fact becoming the cosmic Christ.”

mystical or esoteric, it is simply another path leading to “the great highway opened up in the Church by the onrush of the cult of the Holy Eucharist.”¹⁷⁸

For it is the eucharistic Christ that controls and determines (as a continuing force of orthogenesis), all events and actions in history, “at every moment the eucharistic Christ controls. . . the whole movement of the universe.”¹⁷⁹ It is Christ’s sacramental action (extending even to hell), that sanctifies all matter. . . the eucharistic Christ is the “ultimate determinant.”¹⁸⁰ And the teleological aim of the eucharistic Christ is to unite all things with God in eschatological transubstantiation: “As our humanity assimilates the material world, and as the Host assimilates our humanity, the eucharistic transformation goes beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar.”¹⁸¹ Thus, the eucharistic Christ is not only the agent of divine incarnation into the world, but also the agent for the transubstantiation of the world into God. Like Luther’s metaphysics of double predestination that determines the eschatological outcome of humanity, the eucharistic Christ of Teilhard is an equally determining force for human history, yet the damned are ultimately not consigned to the fires of hell, but mercifully allowed to participate in the final Pleroma.¹⁸² Finally, the human response to Christ’s sovereign act of incarnation-transubstantiation is simply, as in Luther, *faith* in the sacramental word. For it is these words that reveal Christ and operate salvation. Teilhard prays, “Teach me to adore [the world] by seeing you concealed within it, O Lord, repeat to me the great liberating words, the words which at once reveal and operate: *Hoc est Corpus meum*.”¹⁸³

In short, what holds all things together in Teilhard’s metaphysics is the eucharistic Christ as the panentheistic orthogenesis which directs the progressive incarnation of all things into Christ’s mystical body (Christogenesis), and the final consummation of all things into Omega’s

Harvey D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 579.

¹⁷⁸ *The Divine Milieu*, 96.

¹⁷⁹ *The Divine Milieu*, 98.

¹⁸⁰ *The Divine Milieu*, 99.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² “The fallen spirits cannot detract from the perfection of the Pleroma. Each soul that is lost in spite of the call of grace ought to spoil the perfection of the final and general union; but instead, O God, you offset it by one of those recastings which restore the universe at every moment to a new freshness and a new purity. The damned are not excluded from the Pleroma, but only from its luminous aspect, and from its beatification. They lose it, but they are not lost to it.” *The Divine Milieu*, 125.

¹⁸³ *The Divine Milieu*, 112.

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timeless mystical soul (Pleroma). This cosmic/divine operation is “the quantitative repletion and the qualitative consummation of all things: it is the mysterious Pleroma, in which the substantial *one*, and the created *many* fuse without confusion in a *whole* which, without adding anything essential to God, will nevertheless be a sort of triumph and generalization of being.”¹⁸⁴

Summary

Unlike most theologies that begin with a doctrine of God, Teilhard’s theology begins with an evolutionary cosmology where matter arises by chance. Shortly thereafter God decides to physically immerse himself in it and take the reins to direct the evolutionary ascent—using evil as a necessary and integral component of divinization—with the goal of exiting time and space to enter into timeless and immaterial oneness with God. Evolutionary man is defined by Teilhard as a compound composed of a visible external part and a psychic and divine inner part. In other words, Teilhard interprets man according to the traditional philosophical dualism of a temporal body and an immortal soul. The divine subject of Teilhard’s spirituality—God—is likewise interpreted as having a temporal body (the world) and a transcendent timeless Spirit. Union between the human and divine subjects occurs as humans exercise faith in an evolutionary God (who divinizes matter and human experiences, both activities and passivities) and a Eucharistic Christ (who is the “ultimate determinant,”¹⁸⁵ controlling the movements of the entire universe). And it is this Eucharistic Christ, who determines the panentheistic evolutionary ascent to the timeless Pleroma, that comprises the metaphysical center of Teilhard’s theology.

Summary and Conclusion

In Part 2 of this series on biblical spirituality we explored how Christian spirituality—the relation between the divine and human subjects—has traditionally been interpreted through the macro-hermeneutical presuppositions of Greek philosophy.

¹⁸⁴ *The Divine Milieu*, 95.

¹⁸⁵ *The Divine Milieu*, 99.

	Being (Ontology)	God (Theology)	Humanity (Anthropology)	Knowledge (Epistemology)	The World (Cosmology)	Articulation (Metaphysics)
Classical <i>(Augustine)</i>	Timeless Immutable (Ahistorical)	Timeless Immutable	Dual: Timeless Soul/ Temporal Body	Suprational abstraction of timeless truths	2 Worlds/ Progressive creationism	Panentheism and Predestination
Protestant <i>(Luther)</i>	Timeless Immutable (Ahistorical)	Timeless Immutable	Dual: Timeless Soul/ Temporal Body	Suprational faith in eucharistic words	2 Worlds/ Creationism	Christ-centered Panentheism and Double Predestination
Modern <i>(Teilhard)</i>	Timeless Immutable (Ahistorical)	Dual: Timeless Spirit Temporal Body	Dual: Timeless Soul/ Temporal Body	Science and Suprational (intuitive) faith in eucharistic words	2 Worlds/ Evolution	Panentheism and Predestination

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Augustine believed Neoplatonism was perfectly compatible with Christianity and therefore easily adopted Greek philosophy's interpretation of Being (ontology) and God (theology) as timeless. In his interpretation of human nature (anthropology) Augustine likewise follows the Neoplatonic division of temporal body and immortal soul. Regarding knowledge (epistemology) Augustine sees an ascending order of mystical contemplation. The first involves the soul's higher reason (a prior knowledge of timeless truths) which removes the temporal wrapping from biblical words through Gods speaking directly to Augustine's "inner ear" correcting the plain word of Scripture. Finally, one contemplates the *visio dei*, entering the eternal presence of God and union with Him. We saw that Augustine's cosmology accommodates progressive creationism through the rational seeds God implants in nature and which later evolve, when God ordains, into visible entities. This view is coherent with Augustine's metaphysics which views all things as panentheistically participating, to a greater or lesser degree, in God's timeless immutability. This is accomplished through God's sovereign will, which ultimately determines all reality.

With Luther we saw that while he upheld selected portions of Scripture, he nonetheless utilized the underlying philosophical hermeneutics of the church fathers (such as Augustine) and other early mystical influences.¹⁸⁶ Luther's philosophical interpretation was noted in his view of God as timeless, his understanding of humans as a body-spirit dualism, and finally in spirituality (the union of the divine and human subjects) as a non-cognitive or suprarational act, where faith in God's timeless words (*hoc est corpus meum*) effects God's real presence and confirms salvation. It was also noted that Luther's metaphysics—the relation of the parts with the whole—centered on God's sovereign and timeless will of double predestination (salvation for some, damnation for the rest), which must not be questioned but only adored. Regarding Luther's cosmology we noted that while he accepts the seven-day creation, he does not believe in a special seventh-day blessing either for this world or the next.

¹⁸⁶ Luther's endorsement of Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius does not encompass all they wrote, but primarily the adoption of their macro-hermeneutical presuppositions (the *via negativa*, God's timelessness, dual human nature, and a suprarational faith). At the meso and micro hermeneutical areas Luther could be critical. Among other things, Luther disagreed with Augustine on ecclesiology, the sacraments, and purgatory. For Luther's critique of Pseudo Dionysius see Knut Alfsvåg, "Luther as a Reader of Dionysius the Areopagite," *Studia Theologica* 65:2 (2011): 101–114.

Finally, we saw Teilhard's theology begins with an evolutionary cosmology where matter arises by chance. Shortly thereafter God decides to physically immerse himself in matter and direct the evolutionary ascent (using evil as an integral component of divinization) with the goal of exiting time and space to enter the *pleroma*—oneness with the timeless and immaterial part of God. Evolutionary man is a compound composed of a visible external part and a psychic and divine inner part (traditional anthropological dualism). The divine subject of Teilhard's spirituality—God—is likewise interpreted as having a temporal body (the world) and a transcendent timeless Spirit. Union between the human and divine subjects occurs as humans exercise an intuitive faith in an evolutionary God (who divinizes all matter and human experiences, both activities and passivities) and a Eucharistic Christ (who is the “ultimate determinant,”¹⁸⁷ controlling the movements of the entire universe).

In short, all three models (classical, Protestant, and modern) define God as timeless and immaterial, and humans as a duality made up of an immortal soul and temporal body. Moreover, all three models define union with God (spirituality) in terms of the soul's non-cognitive or suprarational ability. Thus, while all three models utilize Scripture, the selected texts are not interpreted cognitively nor in relation to the rest of Scripture (*tota Scriptura*), but through the immortal soul's assumed ability to extract timeless truth, either through the soul's higher reason (Augustine), faith (Luther), or intuition (Teilhard). Metaphysically, the spiritual glue that holds all three systems together is the hierarchical view of God as panentheistically determining all things.

Part 3 will therefore turn to a very different path: the biblical model of spirituality revealed in Yahweh's self-disclosure at Sinai and the sanctuary-covenant structure of Exodus. Here, union with God is not mystical ascent or evolutionary convergence but God's covenantal relationship with His people in history. This sanctuary-shaped narrative unfolds a radically distinct vision of divine-human communion—one grounded not in timeless abstractions but in God's living Word and saving acts within time.

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¹⁸⁷ *The Divine Milieu*, 99.