

The Alchemical Eucharist: The Christian Influence on Medieval Esotericism

Nicholas Evancho

April 21, 2018

Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Historical Background	5
3	As Above, So Below	16
3.1	The Christian Doctrine of Creation	17
3.2	Esoteric Correspondences	25
3.3	The World of Correspondence	29
4	The Alchemical Universe	32
4.1	Dual Nature in Christianity	32
4.2	Dual Nature in Creation	39
4.3	Duality and Union	49
5	Sacramental Transformation	54
5.1	Transubstantiation and the Eucharistic Miracle	55
5.2	The Alchemical Eucharist	61
5.3	Christ the Philosopher's Stone	67
6	Conclusion	71

Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the beginning of human consciousness, those same humans have struggled to understand the world around them and their part in its system. As a part of the physical world, it is natural to desire greater connection with the rest of that order by growth in understanding and synthesis. However, the composition and laws that govern the natural order are deeply complicated and elusive requiring a constantly changing and evolving theory on the part of the inquirer. Each generation and group of people brings their own lens to understanding this objective reality and seeks to find a solution that accords with their own assumptions and beliefs. Therefore, even when objective data comes out of observation and interaction with creation, the mind which must create a synthetic explanation of these phenomena often does so in a way that connects with its own preexisting worldview.

It can be said that the Roman theological outlook was an overarching assumption dominating the thought of the western medieval world. Not only did the Roman church have a significant and important role in the governmental structures of the medieval world, but it also had a hold on the mind of the thinkers of that age. The church and its religious orders, being the main driver behind the growth of intellectualism and systematic learning, had a major influence on the distinctions and frameworks that formed the dominant worldview. In fact, the church was so essential to the cultural and intellectual milieu of the Middle Ages that it was difficult to conceive of a world divorced from the overarching framework of Christian thought.

This is not to say that the dominant cultural view was always representative of magisterial orthodoxy in the way that the theologians of the church would have intended. Popular piety among the uneducated faithful was always open to philosophical overreach and distortion of doctrine without the correction and influence of systematic writings and the work of the universities. Lack of literacy and access to the texts, not only of scripture, but of the life of the church opened the door for misunderstanding and a sort of new and often curious theology. The majority of the church's work including preaching was not done in the vernacular tongue and was therefore incomprehensible to all those outside of the church hierarchy. Furthermore, nearly the entirety of the Roman liturgy was done in the secret voice and obscured from the view of the gathered faithful. By limiting knowledge of the faith and the work of the church to the domain of the clergy, the medieval church allowed for the quick formation of radical and incorrect understandings and applications of church doctrine.

This forming and evolving understanding of the faith greatly influenced the attempt of those same people to understand the world around them. Because the foundation of medieval philosophical and conceptual thought was the context of Christian doctrine and practice, when inquiry began into the workings of the natural world it was done from the same theological origin. God was seen as the origin of all things and the supreme governor of the world and so it was firmly believed that anything which was true of God would be true of the world at least in a limited sense. Within the medieval consciousness, there was an assumed link between the study of the Creator and the study of the creation and each was able to inform the study of the other.

In today's world, the idea that scientific inquiry should begin within the framework of Christian theology seems misguided and antiquated. However, in the Middle Ages there was not yet an intellectual distinction between the veracity of theology and that of physical science. This allowed for a sort of spiritual science which conceived of a divinely infused world in which all perceived truths were intimately related and knowledge of the Creator dictated the understanding of the creation. It is difficult for the modern mind to blend the beliefs of

faith with the distinctions and formulas of science but for the medieval theologians and esotericists it was impossible to separate the two without somehow admitting that one was not fully true. Through the recovery of the spirit of these esoteric doctrines, the modern Christian can regain an openness to a universe of divine immanence and action during a time where the natural world is understood solely through a mechanical lens.

Chapter 2

Historical Background

The development of human religion has been driven over time by the deep need of all human beings to understand their environment and to connect with that which is larger than themselves. The world and the lives of all who live in it are full of encounters with creation and all of its intricacies and mysteries. These encounters draw the human soul into the quest to make and find the meaning in the natural and supernatural order. It is acknowledged without proof and without argument that there is a reality which exists outside of human understanding and control, but it is the never-ending struggle of humanity to take hold of this reality and unpack and shape it into the meaning which empowers and drives the experience of human life.

Much of this struggle for contact with the divine has come through the form of discerning, finding, and drawing out the presence of God within the natural order. Theologians and philosophers have argued for centuries about the medium which best embodies the presence of God within their own world and context. Does God make Himself present to humanity through inspired word and symbol or through metaphysical infusion of the matter of the universe? The early and medieval catholic church was inherently comfortable with the idea that the physical presence of the divine permeates the physical world in which we live our everyday lives. It was not until the Reformation that an impassable trench was created between that which is divine and that which is worldly within the Christian universe.¹ The modern,

1. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 4.

post-enlightenment view of Christian worship is often seen as merely symbolic in value making the presence of God nothing more than a proposition. The earlier Catholics knew what it meant to truly encounter the presence of God in worship and the deep reverence and fear that accompany this experience. However, these beliefs in transformation and tangible contact with divinity are often dismissed as naive superstition in today's naturalistic world.

This is not to say that the Reformed tradition does not have its own tradition of engagement with the divine, but such engagement is seen only as action at a distance. The God of the universe is seen not as the force which permeates all things but as a sovereign and transcendent entity which triumphs over and controls the depraved earth. This theology allows for a God who can know and ordain what will happen in the future but one who sees it as if looking down from the safety of the high and lofty heaven. For example, Zwingli believes that the sacraments of the church are conduits of grace only insofar as they constitute pledges of faith on the part of the recipient.² There is no room for physical divine presence within the church for such a descent of the transcendent is a move which lessens the greatness of God and reduces faith to a sort of magic. Zwingli goes so far in this notion as to say that Christ Himself speaks only metaphorically when imploring the disciples to eat of this bread as His body in remembrance of Him. The reformer believes that this is just a veiled reference to bidding the people to have faith in the Gospel that He proclaimed. To believe in the engagement of the earthly senses with the direct presence of the divine was a step too far for the intellectual spirit of the Swiss Reform.³ In an attempt to guard against superstition and inordinate devotion to created objects, Zwingli and the Swiss Reformers lessened the immanence of God, thereby abstracting the sense of His presence.

This sense of the real presence of God is best seen within the context of the Eucharistic practice of the medieval church and the devotion and belief that developed around it. When the fathers of the church and the medieval doctors of the church looked at the host which rose above the priest's head, they did not question whether or not Christ was truly and physically

2. Courvoisier, *Zwingli, a Reformed Theologian*, 64.

3. Courvoisier, *Zwingli, a Reformed Theologian*, 68.

present within this form of physicality but rather how God could have created and instituted such a miraculous way of placing us within His most glorious and fearsome presence. It is a frightening and visceral experience to find oneself within the real and physical presence of God, but it is this very feeling which informed and shaped piety and philosophy throughout the middle ages. God was not an abstract concept or feeling which dwelt in an inaccessible plane, but rather a real, effectual, and powerful force which undergirds all that is and is to be. Therefore, while His ways were far above and outside of those of agents of created cause, God was not so removed from the world and action of man that He could not participate in the divine nature within Himself and the created order.⁴

The greatest obstacle to a realistic and faithful understanding of the pre-reformation Eucharistic tradition is the metaphysical and philosophical distance that has been cultivated within the modern world. Due to discomfort and fear of the real and physical presence of God, He and His agency become separated from the interactions of daily life.⁵ As knowledge of the created order developed through the disciplines of science and philosophy, God also began to be relegated to the realm of the conceptual and intangible. Having lost a truly sacramental conception of the universe in which all processes and things are part of the divinely inspired order, each change in understanding of the world serves not to develop doctrine but to attack the credibility of religion. As the modern thinker encounters the cognitive dissonance of new discovery and thought, he or she leans not on the presence of God for support but rather limits his or her own thinking to personal experience and understanding. The modern thinker either becomes fettered to metaphysical and theological convictions, such that he or she ignores the continued revelation of God, or believes that God was never there at all.⁶ The scientific and theological outlook of the medieval mind is so distant from the modern worldview that to understand the thought of the medieval theologians is to enter into a different world.

4. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 5.

5. Orsi, *History and Presence*, 4.

6. Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, 69.

The world of the catholic church is one in which there is no divide between the physical and spiritual. To live in the world is to participate in the reality of God and to encounter the divine presence in the ordinary matter of life. The Holy can transform the natural since it has been within it and sustaining it from the beginning of the world. This is not to say that the faith encourages a superstitious and anti-intellectual worldview, but rather one which has a due and intrinsic respect for the physical and tangible presence of God within the world we inhabit.⁷ This is the mystery which surpasses the knowledge of particles and cells and the laws that govern our universe. This is the mystery of existence and the real power of the universe. Despite the modern desire to separate the realms of divinity and nature with an impassible wall, one cannot close off the room for divinity from within the world that it created, for that divinity is being itself.⁸

This intensely real, tangible understanding of the universe and the God who created and sustains it found its natural focus and enactment in the ceremonies of the Eucharist. It was this physical ceremony which became ingrained within the hearts of the faithful as the paragon of God's interaction with the world. This sanctified interaction between heaven and earth became so hallowed in the Christian tradition that a fearful and visceral devotion to the bread and wine that are the Body and Blood of Christ dominated the Christian consciousness throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

This practice entered the Christian narrative through the very actions of Christ and His disciples and therefore was divinely instituted as a part of the tradition and faith which has been given to the church. This resonated particularly strongly during the birth of the Church as many clergy and faithful were to meet their own experiences of martyrdom and persecution in participation with the sacrifice of Christ. By finding communion with the One who gave of His Own Body and Blood for the good of the world, each Christian was strengthened in the call to follow in the way of sacrifice.⁹ It is this peculiar ceremony which became en-

7. Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, 102.

8. Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, 103.

9. MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 96.

throned in the Christian tradition as the great and perfect way to experience the presence of the Risen Christ and to become one with His struggle both in the spirit and in the world. No form of prayer surpassed the Eucharist in intimacy or in power since, through this sacrament, the priest was able to call the very presence of the Risen One to the altar for the benefit of the faithful.¹⁰ Through the power of the Sacrament, God exercised His own authority over the very matter of the universe to bring about the coming of His Son.

Devotion to the Eucharist only increased as the Church grew throughout the Middle Ages. The faithful sought to amplify their own power to pray with the more powerful intercession of the priests whose hands had the power to confect the bread of life. The Eucharist was no longer simply a ceremony of the Christian journey which marked the weekly feast, but rather the defining act of prayer for the average Christian disciple. Mass began to be said for all occasions in the Christian life from birth to death and all divine petitions were accompanied by the Holy Sacrifice.¹¹ It was the real presence of Christ in their midst that drove the faith of the medieval church and stood at the heart of clergy and congregations.

As mentioned before, this presence was not seen in a figurative or symbolic light but as the true coming of divinity into the realm of created man. This visceral and tangible understanding of the holy presence led not only to deep reverence but also to a deep fear of contact with the Almighty. As devotion to and belief in the real presence grew, reception of the Eucharistic gifts by the laity decreased. The sharing in the consumption of the Body and Blood of Christ was replaced by gazing on the elevated host in awed silence. The faithful would be sure to obey the command of the Church to receive the precious body at least once a year, but such intimate contact with the divine was something to be feared and for which great preparation and instruction were needed.¹²

It was within this atmosphere in which Eucharistic theology was born. While the Church was well convinced that Christ was truly present within the Eucharistic Feast, it was the

10. MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 356.

11. MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 356.

12. MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 432.

growth of scholasticism which would dedicate the minds of many great scholars to pondering how exactly this presence and transformation is accomplished. As philosophical scholars like Thomas Aquinas and others began to reason out the means by which the work of the Sacrament is accomplished upon the altar of each and every priest, various schools of thought and theories entered into the Christian consciousness. These include the categories and distinctions of Plato and Aristotle in addition to those of St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and other early Christian thinkers. Because the world was created by God governed by holy laws, it is only natural that the Eucharist would work within these same systems if only in a greater and more excellent way.

The quest to understand these natural systems and laws in light of the spiritual and philosophical realities of the Middle Ages gave rise to what later became known as esotericism. Because spirituality and church doctrine remained an essential part of the common mental framework until the Enlightenment, many of the doctrines of the faith were brought to bear upon the study of the world. Understanding of divinity and faith was not an intellectual or intangible exercise but was an integral part of understanding the existence in which humankind finds itself immersed. Since the world was a divine creation, it was believed that there could be no separation between the natural and spiritual without logical contradiction. During the enlightenment and growth of pure reason, the integration of spirituality into the study of the natural world was seen as an attack on reason or a form of primitive superstition and was denigrated by the dominant scientific community.¹³ This rejection did not completely destroy these disciplines and they continued to develop under various names and many writers well through the Renaissance.

These traditions collectively became known as esotericism and their effects were seen throughout the development of scientific knowledge as well as Christian mysticism. Throughout the Middle Ages the assumptions of Neoplatonism and Hermeticism permeated the culture of Christian thought and shaped the worldviews of those who dedicated their academic

13. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 4.

lives to understanding the central mysteries of the Christian faith.¹⁴ This worldview was founded upon a belief that all things in the created and spiritual worlds were intimately related and that there is nothing which exists or operates in isolation. The proper working of the world means that the actions of the lower sphere of which we are a part are in total cooperation with the higher spheres and movements of the universe which proceed from the movement of God. The divinity which redeems the human soul could therefore also redeem the creation as humanity cannot be unrelated to the natural order.¹⁵ Participation in and facilitation of this redemption was the work of the alchemist who sought to purify and enhance the divinity of the world and the soul for mutual enlightenment.¹⁶ Alchemy is therefore both spiritual practice and scientific study which unites the transformation of the practitioner with the transformation of chemical matter.

Throughout the twentieth century, the esoteric disciplines began to gain recognition as an area of academic study. Western esotericism was established as a subject of interdisciplinary research combining theology, science, and history into a united whole. The coalescence of inquiry in this area yielded the creation of European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism among other professional groups and journals that focused on this previously undervalued area of research. One of the men who was instrumental in this foundation was the historian Antoine Faivre. Faivre held an endowed chair at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* at the University of Paris and gave great recognition to the field of esoteric study during its formation. In order to define the complex and new field of esotericism, Faivre named four cardinal qualities of the esoteric traditions.

The first of these is the doctrine of correspondence. This idea asserts that all things in both the spiritual world and the material world are linked through analogy and common origin. The human soul does not exist as a thing which is exalted beyond the simple, unthinking solidity of nature but is a living part of the entire cosmic system which is intimately linked

14. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 7.

15. Martin, *Alchemy & Alchemists*, 17.

16. Martin, *Alchemy & Alchemists*, 22.

to all other processes and beings. The ways in which the planets rotate and the metabolism of the world's flora participate in the spiritual order of the universe as much as the workings of the human soul. All parts of the world can be related to all others and these relations are hidden only to the one who is not enlightened through study and faith. For this reason, the changes and processes which apply to the soul and cosmic order also apply to the metals on the bench of the alchemist.¹⁷

In like fashion, all esoteric disciplines have an understanding of nature as a living thing which possesses a soul with which one can interact. There is no division between inanimate and ensouled beings within the esoteric worldview as all things are subject to and a part of the spiritual forces that give existence to the world. Nature is seen not as a mechanistic or deterministic ecosystem of laws and reactions but as a spirited, live being whose interrelatedness causes all interactions to ripple throughout the whole of creation.¹⁸ All matter within creation is therefore believed to be not only spiritual but on the same plane of being and causality as the alchemist who sought to understand them.¹⁹ Interaction with creation is therefore not a precise or predictable endeavor but is instead an art form and spiritual action which requires deep study and connection to the animating spirit of the whole of said creation. This means that certain elements and things repel or attract each other by the energy of their nature and their role in the natural order. Metals and human souls are related by the same animating spirit which allows each to affect the other and to be influenced by the skilled philosopher.²⁰

The third characteristic of the esoteric disciplines is their reliance on the imaginative and meditative capacity of the human soul. The cultivation of the human capacity to see beyond their own senses to the transcendent and spiritual nature of the world around them is the goal of esoteric practice and a significant part of the enlightenment of which the alchemical literature exults. This imagination includes an awareness of the hierarchy and processions of intermediaries and levels of divine presence which ascend to God who is the peak of divinity.

17. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 8.

18. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 4.

19. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 8.

20. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 8.

These steps on the cosmic ladder of creative procession form a devotional framework which the esoteric practitioner works to ascend as he seeks greater and greater awareness of and union with the divine order. It is this imagination which gives rise to the beautiful and intricate imagery which is associated with the esoteric traditions as practitioners seek to bring that imaginative spirituality into media of the physical world.²¹

The fourth and most well-known characteristic of the esoteric disciplines is their interest in the phenomenon of transmutation. This idea is stereotyped in the example of turning lead into gold, but actually applies not only to metals or matter but to the human soul and relationship with the divine.²² The act of communion with nature and divinity which allows the alchemist to transform the base elements into their purer and more spiritual forms also purifies the alchemist and renews them as a person. Transmutation is therefore experienced in the same framework of correspondence in which all other phenomena of the universe are understood. As the metals undergo their purification through fire and reaction, so the alchemist undergoes his own purification through interaction with the cosmic and divine order. Alchemy is at its heart a science of purification and divine unification and this applies as much to the practitioner as to the objects of his practice.²³

These esoteric disciplines represented an opportunity for the church to connect to the history of thought and to ground itself in the tradition of ancient enlightenment. A deep link was formed between the wisdom which had been sought and explored from the beginning of the world and the fullness of the revelation that was given to the church in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. This allowed the Christian tradition to be understood and explained as the crown of knowledge which finally brought about the whole of enlightenment which had been pursued from the beginning of humanity.²⁴ For this reason, all esoteric and ancient wisdom began to be viewed through the lens of the Christian tradition and influenced by the key doctrines and images of the new theology.

21. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 9.

22. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 5.

23. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 9.

24. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 9.

Furthermore, as the works of Aristotle were rediscovered and began to revolutionize the neo-platonic world of previous theological thought through the work of Thomas Aquinas, a new opportunity was given for esoteric doctrines to flourish as previous orthodoxy was disrupted.²⁵ When fixed ideas begin to be incongruent with new learning, the theological resolution to that challenge incorporates both new and ancient ideas to fill the vacuum of explanation.²⁶ New ideas which are posed to fill these new openings in the structure of explanation often start as esoteric belief but are later integrated into the dominant synthesis and universally accepted. This is most clearly seen in the contributions of Galileo during his own conflict with the Papal magisterium. While his heliocentric theories were seen as esoteric and threatening when they conflicted with the dominant theological synthesis, as new information arose and ideas change his theory were integrated into accepted knowledge.²⁷ Esotericism finds its home in intellectual disruption and drives the formation of new and updates understandings of the natural and theological world.

Modern scientific inquiry is once again bringing these previously rejected notions to light as the mechanistic and materialistic worldview begins to be challenged by new discoveries. New discoveries regarding quantum entanglement and the probabilistic nature of the universe have given a new opening for the integration of esotericism into the dominant scientific narrative. While esotericism always remains on the outskirts of the scientific and theological traditions, it has a timeless significance to the development of human knowledge and connection to the divine.

What modern physicists and chemists call the “observer effect” is not far removed from what the alchemists of old called “faith.”²⁸ The advent of quantum physics has opened a greater sense of participation on the part of the human being in the mechanisms and workings of creation. The modern view of matter, which was born of enlightenment philosophy, sees matter as completely removed from the domain of the mind and spirit as to be devoid of divine pres-

25. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 13.

26. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 6.

27. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 12.

28. Martin, *Alchemy & Alchemists*, 17.

ence or action.²⁹ Quantum physics has challenged this dichotomy by involving the power of the observing mind in the physical systems of the universe. It is the connection of a system to the observer that moves the probable to the actual and brings definite form to matter which contains multiple possible states.³⁰ This openness to the connectivity of mind and nature is essential not only to the divinely interlaced world of the alchemist but also to the foundational principles of the universe as they are being further understood.

The quest to understand the workings of natural matter became entwined with the understanding of that most precious Sacrament in such a way as to influence the development of the natural sciences and their underlying assumptions and philosophy. The firm distinction between the spirituality of alchemy and the Eucharist and the scientific discipline of chemistry is a modern invention of a culture that is all too uncomfortable with the real and tangible presence of God. If it was possible for ordinary bread and wine to be transformed into the real body and blood of the Risen Christ through the art of the clergyman, then in how many ways can the skilled practitioner of the alchemical arts change the divinely infused world around him. Within this atmosphere of divine presence and transformation, the alchemical tradition developed, and the field of chemistry was born.

29. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, 130.

30. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, 121.

Chapter 3

As Above, So Below

As Hermes Trismegistus said in the Emerald Table: “That which is above is like to that which is below, and that which is below is like to that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of one thing.”¹ If we are to understand the presence of God within the universe as we encounter it within the sacraments and the processions of the created order, we must first understand how He interacts with that order both in its creation and sustenance. It is the decision of the alchemist and certainly the orthodox Christian that the involvement of the divine in the created order does not cease at the time of creation but extends into the future through a constant relationship. It is through participation in this relationship between Creator and created that we are able to see and bring about transformation within this world. Therefore, it is this holy entanglement of the whole with the part that undergirds a sacramental and divine view of the universe.

Within both the scholastic and hermetic traditions there is a firm conviction that creation is not a single event but rather the result of emanation and procession from the greater to the lesser forms of being. Matter and things are not created so that they may exist of their own accord but rather they are lent being by the God who is pure being. This makes creation a relationship between the creator and created rather than a single event by which an independent being is instantiated. All creation is therefore contingent upon the creator and exists only as it remains in communion with the source of all being. While the dynamics and char-

1. Trismegistus, *The Emerald Table*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 28

acteristics of this relationship differ between the hermetic and scholastic traditions, it is this relationship which represents the foundation of their respective worldviews.

3.1 The Christian Doctrine of Creation

Within Christian thought, the relations and processions of the Triune life of God form the basis and pattern for understanding all other processes of the natural world. This was seen as its own form of esoteric knowledge even by the great doctor Thomas Aquinas. All other characteristics of God were said to be obtainable through the use of one's own reason and inquiry into the created order. Thomas asserted that the great pagan thinkers made great progress toward an understanding of the one God but were limited from full understanding by lack of a knowledge that was not yet revealed to them. However, without the gift of divine revelation, one could not hope to elucidate the intricacies and intimacy of the Triune life of God.² It is this divinely revealed truth which begins to form a new worldview among Christians and entirely new philosophical tradition as a whole.

According to Aquinas, the Trinity is formed as one single whole characterized by the relationships and interactions of its three persons. Since God is being, perfect action, and perfect intellect in His very essence, He must, therefore, understand Himself perfectly and create within Himself a self-image with its own being and existence.³ In God's understanding of His own nature and self-image, he is said to conceive the Word which is His Son.⁴ They are of the same nature and share the same state of pure and total being and are thus fully united with one another. Therefore, they exist in a perfect relationship and sharing of being which serves as a model for the proper relationship of all creation.

In addition to the unity of substance and being which exists within the persons of the Father and the Son, there is also an active unity of Love between them which we call the Holy

2. *Compendium Theologiae*, 6.

3. *CT*, 6.

4. *CT*, 37.

Spirit. It is this love which accounts for the dynamic unity of the Trinity and draws the persons together.⁵ The Spirit enacts this unity as it proceeds from the Father and the Son, given to each other in mutual love. This spirit is the unitive function of the Triune life and is the paragon for being and procession between the creator and created.

The overarching metaphor for all things within the great synthesis of Aquinas is the pattern of *exitus* and *reditus*.⁶ Because all things come from the perfect God and are sustained by Him, they all seek unity with Him which is their own route to perfection. While this idea draws upon the Neoplatonic notion of emanation, it does so with alteration and Christian clarification. Because God is omnipotent and works in perfect freedom constrained only by His own imposed limits, all acts of creation by the Deity must be free and perfect acts. Therefore, all creations are said to proceed from God, given being by participation in the pure being which is the essence of the Creator. Each creation is then given that same pure being as its final cause and path to perfection. All things that come from God are thus intended to return to Him as the Earth is reconciled and brought to its fulfillment.⁷ It is this circular path which characterizes the whole of the world both as it is to us and it is to God.

Through the Greek philosophical heritage of the Christian scholastic tradition, the natural order is conceived as a series of processions and hierarchies descending from the one, pure being of God. Since perfect unity is found within the pure being of God, all things that exist in diverse and lesser forms must exist as processions from that one Source.⁸ God, being the foremost and first cause of all things, necessarily causes all things to exist by virtue of His own uncaused being.⁹ This is not to say that the God of the Universe constitutes a single cause after which the universe continues in its being and creation according to its own contingencies, rather the God who is its first cause is also that which continues to lend being to all levels of the cosmic hierarchy generated beneath Him.¹⁰ Therefore, a divine and constant relationship

5. *CT*, 46.

6. Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, 79.

7. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 2*, 54.

8. Davies and Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 61.

9. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.6.2.

10. *SCG*, II.6.3.

is established between the Creator and created which undergirds the very being of the order of the universe.

This continuing relationship is exemplified by the enduring presence of God within all parts of the creation. This presence takes the form of Divine likeness which can be found in the formal causes of all beings.¹¹ The first emanations within the Divine Being are those of the Son and Holy Spirit which constitute the triune life of God. These beings form perfect likenesses of the creator and are co-equal in divinity and being such that they exist within the same unity as the Creator.¹² The persons of the Son and Spirit are generated by the father but in a way that is more perfect and distinct from that of all natural beings and creations. This perfect way retains both perfect procession from and relation to God as an intrinsic part of divine being.¹³ This perfect embodiment of procession in complete communion serves as the paragon of all divine processions and relationships and it is to this state that all things are destined to return at the consummation of all things.¹⁴

A continuing relationship between the natural order and the Creator is necessary within the Thomistic worldview because only God can possess being by His own right and nature. All other things which are made by God rely on Him to share in being so that they may exist. The things of the world are said to be contingent upon God because if they cease to participate in the goodness of divinity then they will cease to have being. This is a difficult notion for a modern and materialistic mind which sees matter as a persistent and foundational quantity within the natural order.

Even scholastic theologians differed on this particular belief about the contingent nature of material being. Some scholars read Duns Scotus to say that God and matter possess being in the same way such that matter can exist while not linked to God. By affirming that matter can exist of its own accord and that being is simply a quality which is shared by both God and matter, the possibility of separation between the two parties is opened within the Christian

11. *SCG*, II.6.6.

12. Davies and Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 61.

13. Davies and Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 420.

14. Davies and Stump, *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 421.

worldview. While not intended for this purpose, this affirmation of a non-contingent creation allows the active hand of God to be removed from the world and overemphasizes divine transcendence to the detriment of God's immanence.¹⁵

As the simple and overarching cause, God by His own nature generates things which are like unto Him. As fire begets heat and fire when exposed to matter which surrounds it, God acts as a cause only to generate things which share His qualities and likeness to varying degrees. Only God Himself can cause things to proceed in His perfect likeness as He does with the generation of the Son and Spirit, but as Aristotle teaches it is a mark of perfection in all things when they can increase in their likeness to their Creator by causing things which bear likeness to themselves.¹⁶ The persons of the Trinity are therefore said to be begotten of or proceeding from the Father rather than created as they are not removed from Himself but rather exist in perfect relationship and likeness to Him. God being perfect, creates things which participate in that perfection to differing and varied degrees.

The greatest image of the Trinity is imparted to the human being as that creation which inherits intellect and will from the One that created him. This creates within the human person the ability to understand God and the nature of the universe and to participate in the work of divine action through their own will.¹⁷ It is therefore through both the divine and human persons that we begin to understand the mechanisms and intentions of the processions of creation. Just as the aforementioned fire lends its quality of heat to those things around it according to its own strength, with a strong fire heating strongly in both temperature and distance and a weak fire limiting itself to a small area and a light heat, the God who is perfect in being and action lends His qualities to the things of all levels of creation.¹⁸

Although this image is seen most perfectly in the divine persons and in the creation of humanity, this doctrine of emanation follows down to every level of the natural order. Only things which proceed from and retain some relationship with the Creator can remain in exis-

15. Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 72.

16. *SCG*, II.6.5.

17. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 2, 59.

18. *SCG*, II.6.7.

tence as being is given in a constant process of lending by the grace of the God who is being in essence.¹⁹ The entirety of creation can then be organized as a set of emanations from the one God who gives them being. In this way, God is said by Albert the Great to be the artisan of the universe. The ideal image and form of the thing created is born within the mind of the artisan who then relies on the instrumental causes of the material and creative process to bring that form into material being.²⁰ These instrumental causes then mediate the flow of the divine likeness into the creation of earthly being. All things flow from the intended image and spiritus of the Divine Artisan and reflect that same form from which they were created.²¹

The spiritus of the Divine Artisan is limited only by the eternal truths which form the nature and character of God. Obviously even God Himself is limited by the bounds of logical possibility. For example, the intention of God cannot conceive a form which constitutes a fundamental contradiction like a “square circle” or a “red blue” as non-contradiction is an element of nature by virtue of its place in the character of God.²² The laws of nature and logic are not impositions that limit the freedom of the divine creator, but rather they are a quality of the divine nature. Therefore, what is impossible by the principles of logic or natural order is willed to be impossible by the divine creator as incongruent with His will and being.²³ This enshrinement of the natural order and law is essential to the unification of the larger cosmic and closer tangible frames of being.

All earthly creation is further limited by the possibility which is contained within the matter that is employed to embody the form called upon by the Artisan. All things which are possibly wrought from a particular element of matter must exist within the potentiality of that same matter. It is not that matter limits God because God Himself created matter as well but that the differences in being which result from the divine creation show themselves within the potentiality of said matter. For this reason, because God is pure action and contains no

19. *SCG*, II.10.1.

20. Bonin, *Creation as Emanation*, 15.

21. Bonin, *Creation as Emanation*, 16.

22. Bonin, *Creation as Emanation*, 18.

23. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 2, 239.

potentiality, all things must exist within that action.²⁴ Therefore, the created order must at its most base level reflect the mind and likeness of God.

As material things become farther removed from the Source by emanation and creation, their diversity increases and great diversity of being comes into existence. This is not due solely to imperfections, though the capacity for fallenness and corruptibility increases as one proceeds farther into worldliness. Rather, each form of being represents a different and varied embodiment of the divine grace which knows all things and therefore manifests all possibilities of the good creation.²⁵ The diversity of the creation is therefore not an accident or a mark of fallenness but is instead an intended and necessary part of the creation which reflects and participates in the God who created it.

Each of these grades and species of creatures is also said to possess goodness in its own way and to its own degree for the betterment of the entire created order. A natural hierarchy of divinity is formed by the diversity inherent within the creation and each part exemplifies a different characteristic of God and does so to a different degree. Those things which live and affect others embody the divine image to a greater degree than those which exist in what is traditionally considered an inanimate mode.²⁶ Therefore all things which are created possess a certain level of perfection and exist in relationship to all other things within the world.

Evil within the created order manifests itself not only as an inclination away from God, but also as a tendency toward non-being. Being comes as a donation from God who is pure being in essence, therefore evil within the natural order is a move away from the source of being. This evil therefore takes the form of corruptibility which degrades and harms the character of matter. An imperfect object increases in its inclination toward decay and death as it increases in evil for movement away from God is movement towards annihilation. However, any object which exists contains good to a certain extent for anything which is purely evil must cease to exist.²⁷

24. *SCG*, II.45.3.

25. *ST*, I.47.1.

26. *ST*, I.47.2.

27. *ST*, I.48.4.

The final cause of all things which emanate from the one source of cosmic being is to return to that same source. This means that all emanations seek to complete their nature in a way that eliminates all evil and corruptibility within them and to return to the good for which they were intended. For the world to be completed in perfection, it must reach its optimal embodiment of the divine image thereby returning to the source of its being. This is not to say that all things are to obtain the perfect being of the divine persons but rather that they will be perfected in their capacity to bear the image given to them. Therefore, a metal is perfected when it best exemplifies the properties of its form and efficient cause.²⁸ Because a creative agent can only create those things which bear its own image, at least in part, the perfection of an object is found in union with that agent.

The pinnacle of perfection of being is that which is incorruptible and can not fail in doing good such that it brings good to those things which are around it. These things cannot cease to exist and therefore have no evil within them. The fullest realization of this perfection can be exhibited only by divine being but the created order varies in corruptibility according to the good which is in it. Those things containing the most good help to point the rest of the creation back to its source and complete the cycle of procession and return that constitutes the whole of creation.

These correspondences also show themselves within the text of the Roman Canon of the Mass which persists in use to this day albeit in translation. Within the epiclesis of the Roman Canon, the priest asks God that the sacrifice of his own earthly altar be “borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high.”²⁹ This action constitutes the reunion of the material world with that which is above and completes the circle of correspondence within the primary action of the prayer of the church. The direct presence of God within the elements of the mass and the enhancement of this correspondence is central to the action of Christian ritual and constitutes a large part of the work of the church.

Such a mystical reading of Thomas Aquinas and his doctrine of creation is increasing in

28. *SCG*, II.46.2.

29. “Order of Mass.”

popularity in modern Thomism but previous schools of thought have been more closed to the strong platonizing influence of recent readers. Through persistent emphasis on the transcendence rather than the immanence of God, many interpreters seek to disconnect the emanations and processions of the universe from the presence of God in the universe. Thomas himself is firm in his assertion that the nature of God so surpasses that of creation that it is impossible to conflate the two. Thomas outright states that no effect of God or thing on this earth can actually exist within the being of God.³⁰ God, being simple and perfect, cannot contain distinctions or substantive relationship with the creatures of the natural world. In order to remain independent of all things which are subject to Him, God must relate to His creation only in the donation of being and the act of creation. If anything could be said to refer to God in its being then God would be influenced by something outside of Himself, therefore eroding His state of perfection and simplicity.³¹

Some readers take this distinction between God and creation to mean that there can be no substantive relationship between God and His creation but this position can be equally problematic as it erodes the immanence of God. If one is to over-exaggerate the difference of nature between God and the natural world, then one can quickly approach a deistic world view which posits a God who is wholly uninvolved with the world as man experiences it. This too is incompatible with the Christian worldview which emphasizes the relationship between God and the world. While God is certainly the first cause of creation and the genesis of the world, He must remain in relationship with that same world in some way.

Thomas resolves this problem through an understanding of perfections as qualities which emanate from God through the creation. In order for God to bring about the existence of beings with varying degrees of perfection, all perfections must first exist within Him. It is not possible for any agent to create something more perfect or greater than itself, therefore God must surpass and contain all perfections of this world.³² Furthermore, due to the simplicity

30. *SCG*, II.12.1.

31. *SCG*, II.12.2.

32. *CT*, 21.

of the divine nature, all perfections are one in God and differentiation of being comes only by way of procession in the natural world. All things reach their completeness in God and are therefore united insofar as they contain perfections of being. This is not to say that any mortal being or creation can possess perfection in its fullness, but each may have reflections of the divine perfection albeit in a less eminent and excellent way.

The linkages of the world in participation and procession allows for a Christian conception of a natural world which is still subject to the action and character of divinity. Matter can be seen not as a vessel of the worldly and anti-spiritual, but rather as another form in which we may encounter the God who created the universe. By making creation an active relationship rather than a singular and past occurrence, God ceases to be an intellectual construct or completely from the world of sensory experience.

3.2 Esoteric Correspondences

These correspondences between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the human form an integral part of the alchemical worldview. The early medical and chemical sciences saw all material things as a part of a constantly changing and interacting whole which could only be understood through analogy. Since all people and things are formed through emanations which are drawn back to the source, all things can be understood better by better understanding of the source. Furthermore, all things are linked by that common source and each cause within the universe affects all others without regard to distance or separation. This challenged the mechanistic notion that causation could only be affected through direct contact and emphasized the tangible control of the spiritual within the experienced world.

While the Christian philosophers found themselves in danger of limiting the immanence of God in favor of His supreme transcendence, the Hermetic philosophers suffered from an over-emphasis on the tangible and material conception of divinity. For the Hermetic scholar, God perfused the things of the world in such a deep and physical way that He could be ma-

nipulated and engaged by the human actor. This engagement could be taken to such a level as to allow the alchemical practitioner to improve upon the natural order and bring about greater degrees of perfection than existed within creation. For example, Roger Bacon argued that alchemically created gold was even greater than natural gold by virtue of its creation and the art of the alchemist.³³

The idea of correspondence and emanation deeply influenced the ideas of the early scientific and medical researchers leading to interesting, and cosmic ideas of illness and medical intervention. Chief among these thinkers was the philosopher later to be known as Paracelsus. He was a German professor and writer who is widely regarded as the father of modern medicine through his contributions to scientific inquiry. The understanding of the human body had been dominated by the work of Hippocrates and Galen since the classical period but their theories were beginning to be challenged by the ideas of correspondence and spirituality which were put forth by Paracelsus.

Among the disciples and followers of Paracelsus, a new philosophy and scientific understanding was created that was seen as more theologically and scientifically congruent with contemporary belief than the works of Aristotle and Galen. This philosophy was grounded in the idea that the scientific process looks to the two books of divine knowledge: the Bible and the creation. The first was considered the word of God in word by His own inspiration, and the second was seen to point to that same God through vestige and correspondence.³⁴ These together contributed to a new synthetic understanding of God and the world which allowed for a new and more spiritual worldview.

The Paracelsian idea of correspondence is seen most strikingly in the concept of the “weapon salve” as a cure for the wounds of a soldier in battle. This remedy depended primarily on the correspondent relationship between the soldier who was struck and the weapon that caused the injury. Paracelsus directed the medical practitioner to create a salve from a host of curious and symbolic ingredients including blood from the weapon and moss from the decomposing

33. Osler, *Reconfiguring the World*, 23.

34. Osler, *Reconfiguring the World*, 121.

skull of a hanged criminal. This concoction was to be applied to the offending weapon, thereby affecting the cause of the injury and engendering healing in the injured party. The correspondences of the weapon and the injury it caused allow the treatment of one to affect the other and allow for healing action to occur at a distance.³⁵

Correspondence is also a key image and concept in alchemical manuscripts like those of the Franciscan Friar Roger Bacon. In defining the origin of the world and its composition of material elements, Bacon says that all things are “conjoynd by God Almighty in a perfect unity.”³⁶ Central to the formation of the universe is the remaining relationship of God with the created order both as source and final end. All distinctions are able to be manipulated by the alchemical art because they share corresponding natures and properties which are united in the figure of the one God.

The foundational document of the alchemical tradition is widely considered to be *The Emerald Table* by the mysterious Hermes Trismegistus. This esoteric work of poetry which is legendarily said to have been inscribed on a large emerald tablet although the text’s actual origins are difficult to ascertain. Hermetic wisdom is said to have been passed down from the ancient Egyptians and timeless sources of wisdom but recent scholars of esotericism estimate that the piece was more likely written during the early Middle Ages.³⁷ Therefore, while it befits the mythical heritage of alchemy to attribute this to a blessed man of ancient wisdom, it is more likely that it is the work of a medieval scholar working within the same atmosphere as the theologians mentioned above.

The Table begins with affirmation of the correspondences between the spiritual and physical realms in a way that parallels the emanations and creative causes which were asserted by the scholastics. Hermes says that “as all things were by contemplation of one, so all things arose from this one thing by a single act of adaptation.”³⁸ This statement centers creation and emanation around a single and fixed point which must be said to be the origin of all other

35. Osler, *Reconfiguring the World*, 122.

36. Bacon, *Radix Mundi*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 111

37. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 27.

38. Trismegistus, *The Emerald Table*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 28

things. All correspondences must have a point of unity which can link the diverse manifestations of the world into a interrelating whole.

The “one” that is spoken of therefore must be a divine being of either Christian or Platonic origin which animates the world and unites it in common origin and final cause. As has been demonstrated in the discussion of Christian theories of creation and emanation, a theistic worldview which sees the one deity as a creative force lends itself to the idea of heavenly and earthly linkage and relationship. Because every created thing comes from the same head, each also participates in that same head and embodies its characteristics to the degree that it is capable.

This “act of adaptation” also cannot be seen as a finite or simple action within the alchemical worldview. In order for the correspondences to be maintained, the creative and adaptive act must exist as a continuing relationship between the created and creator. If it were a simple and finite act of creation ending once the forms and substances of matter were established, there would be no need for or spiritual backing for correspondence as all nature would be self-sufficient. However, it is essential to the art of the alchemist that a spiritual force sustain all matter. It is this perfusion with a universally shared divine energy that establishes the mechanisms by which the artist may work and interact with the world.

The writer of *The Table* establishes the correspondences of heaven and earth, the macrocosm and microcosm, as the result of the intellect and will of the creator of both. Because the world is ordered by the will of a logical and conscious divine being in whose image we are created, the philosopher is able to work within that order to accomplish the goals of his spiritual and material work. Sir Isaac Newton testifies to this fact in his own *Commentary on The Emerald Tablet* in which he says, “all things were created from one Chaos by the design of one God, so in our art all things, that is the four elements, are born from one thing which is our Chaos, by the design of the Artificer and the skillful adaptation of things.”³⁹

39. Newton, *The Commentary on the Emerald Tablet*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 246

3.3 The World of Correspondence

All things were created from the design of the one God and therefore possess the necessary unity for a synthetic understanding of the cosmic order. However, as Newton attests, all creation is brought out of chaos by the work of a spiritual designer and force. This force is the one God who is the source of all emanations and the commonality of all correspondences. It is the job of the alchemist then to study those adaptations and entanglements and to use their techniques to bring the world closer to its final end in the divine.

The correspondences of the alchemical worldview are a natural extension of the doctrine of emanations and the scholastic view of creation. Because of the sacramental and divinely infused world which is created by the Christian narrative, the mind of the natural observer is drawn to the mysterious processes and spiritual realities which lie behind their surrounding reality. The followers of Esotericism had an openness to this divine element of the Creation and engaged it for the purpose of participation in that divinity and redemption of the natural order. The understanding of correspondence and linkage between the Heavens and the Earth is what draws the alchemist to reach beyond the symbolic and to interact with the world in both its physical and spiritual dimensions.

Alchemy and Esoteric mysticism was built upon a “sacramental ontology” which results from the emanations and linkages which are inherent within the Christian conception of creation.⁴⁰ This concept is difficult to understand from a post-enlightenment point of view which understands the divine at best as an abstraction which is wholly removed from the natural order which is governed by scientific principles. Within the modern worldview, the divine is wholly transcendent and is shown within the natural world only through symbology and personal feeling. Distance like this allows for a sort of dualism in which there are things which are spiritual and things which are natural with an impassible gap between them. Things are not given their being by relationship with the Divine Creator but instead possess being within themselves. At its worst, this doctrine asserts that there is only one type of being and that

40. Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 22.

created matter possesses it to the same level as does a divine being. It is this assumption that allows for a relegation of the divine to the symbolic and abstract areas of the modern imagination.

To call something symbolic is to say that it holds no power within itself but rather refers to the real source of power by redirection. The power of a symbol exists only within the perception of the onlooker and is dependent on a proper understanding of the intent of the correlation. Such a symbolic relationship allows for an intellectual distance between the observer and the symbolic so much that spiritual things can become intangible and removed from the plane of natural life. Today, imagery is used without real belief in the picture that it creates and the real power of such language is hollowed and diminished due to an inability to grasp the spiritual as a reality. Within the worldview of alchemical correspondence, there is no room to interpret divine imagery in a symbolic light as such imagery is seen with the same verity as the sensory observations of life.⁴¹

Though it is often seen in the modern period through symbolic eyes, the world of alchemical correspondence exists within a framework that is better described as sacramental. In such a world, the imagery that is used is not a stand-in for true divine reality but participates in it. And so, the created order of God on earth can be described as a Kingdom in the earthly sense because God is truly sovereign over all creation. However, this is not limited to a metaphorical sense in that an earthly Kingdom also reflects the divine order and is an instrument through which God works to exert His reign over the world. Both the earthly institution and the transcendent reality to which it points are connected in being and purpose and one cannot be said to be wholly removed from the other.⁴²

The esoteric traditions took this sacramentality of the universe to its natural conclusion to which orthodox Christianity was loath to endorse. While the scholastic theologians, especially Aquinas, were careful to say that God was wholly transcendent despite his link with the creation, the esoteric philosophers were far more willing to draw direct lines between

41. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 100.

42. Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 24.

the creator and created. The orthodox theologians believed that creation did participate in the divine, with humanity being the most exalted image, however, they also believed the gap between true divinity and the created order to be metaphysically insurmountable. God transcends every category and idea in divine simplicity and therefore natural things can only be said to participate in Him in a limited way.⁴³

Paracelsus and other alchemical interpreters of scripture saw God fully revealed in the creation as well as the scriptures making no distinction between those things which are sacred and those which are natural. Correspondence means that each object within the natural world reflects and embodies the character of God in a real and physical way. All scientific study must lead to God because all created matter emanates from and is related to that same God.⁴⁴ Paracelsus believed that creation was not actually performed *ex nihilo* but instead resulted from the separation and decomposition of a pure mass of prime matter thus relating all things from the beginning of existence.⁴⁵ This drew ire from more orthodox exegetes of the Christian tradition but it is a simple conclusion based on the interconnected theory of creation that the esoteric traditions inherited from the scholastic doctrine of emanations.

It is this principle of deep interaction between the created order and the Creator that makes the sacramental life of the Christian and the transformations of alchemy possible. Because God lends being to all things, they remain infused with divinity and are related to all other things created by the same God. This sacramental view of creation finds its focus in the sacrament of the Eucharist in which the divinity of matter is unleashed to transform simple bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Through this analogy the universe is given a new framework in which many new transformations and interactions are made possible.

43. *ST*, I.5.3.

44. Killeen and Forshaw, *The Word and the World*, 112.

45. Killeen and Forshaw, *The Word and the World*, 113.

Chapter 4

The Alchemical Universe

Within this interlinked and participatory vision of creation, the alchemical tradition begins to detail its understanding of the created world. Each natural thing is described not only by its physical characteristics but also by its spiritual elements and its relationship to the divine reality from which it proceeds. The alchemist, who is primarily concerned with the metals which were then known, grades them in ascending character according to their purification and perfection. Because all metals were believed to be composed of the same two elemental parts, their only distinctions were thought to arise from differences in purity and proportion.

4.1 Dual Nature in Christianity

One of the primary mysteries of the Christian faith is that of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Since the time of Christ's physical presence on Earth, theologians have been working to understand the man who claimed to be the Son of God. This was a complicated notion because in one way, Christ lived the life of an average human and underwent experiences which are common and endemic to the human condition. However, it can not be denied that He also experienced the true power and excellence of divinity by working miracles during His life and its triumphant and world-defying end. For this reason, the actual nature of the person of Jesus Christ became the subject of intense debate and struggle during the first years of Christianity.

This problem came to a final resolution at the Council of Chalcedon which asserted that

Christ could be understood only as a person of two natures. Those who saw more value in divinity and sought to explain away the human appearance of their Messiah asserted that such humanity was only an appearance imposed upon the perception of humanity. Others sought to attack the unity of Christ's person, and of divinity and humanity in themselves, by saying that Christ held both natures separately in such a way that He could no longer be said to be one person. It was an insufficient explanation of the revelation of the Son of God to say that He was either a purely divine manifestation or a mixture of divine and human persons. To deny the humanity of Christ was as incongruent with divine revelation as was a complete denial of his divinity. Both natures were therefore asserted to be in perfect unity within one body, thereby constituting one perfectly divine and perfectly human person. This unity in duality was proclaimed as official dogma at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and was thereafter the official position of the majority of Christian traditions.¹

While this proclamation was intended to settle the controversy of Christ's nature, it remained a great challenge to theologians and philosophers to explain the possibility of this miraculous union of being. The Chalcedonian definition of the nature of Christ seems on its face to be contradictory and was not simply accepted by all members of the Christian faith. On one hand, the idea that the purity and greatness of the Divine Creator would assume the mortal imperfection of human flesh was to some an impossibility or even offensive. If God was to be truly God, many believed that He must remain entirely removed and sovereign over the world of created and physical being. On another hand, some wanted to make Christ out to be nothing more than a particularly perfected creation and therefore failed to acknowledge the transcendent divinity that was an essential part of His being and ministry on earth. Neither of these arguments was found to properly explain the revelation of the encounter with the living Word and a more nuanced understanding was therefore sought to understand this mystery of the faith.

This difference in understanding of the relationship between God and nature results from

1. "Council of Chalcedon | Christianity."

the same tension between divine transcendence and immanence which is seen in the theology of creation. Those who see God as wholly transcendent and removed from the wretched world believe that the assumption of flesh by the Son would be forcing imperfection onto the perfection of divinity. This would therefore make one of the divine persons less than perfect which would be incomprehensible within the divine economy. For this reason, many early heretics attempted to explain away the human presence of Christ as nothing more than an appearance. It is difficult to get a clear idea of these theories as those who held them would have articulated as much of the writing on the topic is polemic in nature. However, the attitude which was most influential upon and known by esotericism was that of the medieval church although modern historiography has helped to recreate this thought world in greater detail and accuracy, often restoring the image and reputation of supposed early heretics.

Key among these was Mani who taught that it was not God but the devil who created all material things therefore creating a strict dualism between the divine and physical. Therefore, Mani believed that Christ had only the appearance of a body while he acted within the world in order to make the divine comprehensible to those trapped in physicality. The world was thought to be ruled by a lesser deity since all physical things were believed to be opposed to the divine knowledge. Mani believed that Christ relates to the world only in three phases or roles, as divine revelation to Adam, as historical prophet of truth, and as the great judge at the end of time.² In this view, because Christ had body only in appearance, all of the material actions of His earthly life were thought to have occurred only in a sort of divine mirage rather than in actual fact. For example, Christ could not have been circumcised, eaten with His disciples, or been born of Mary since all these things would require that He possess an actual and physical body.³

The gnostic Valentine, not to be confused with the bishop and martyr of the same name, maintained that Christ could not have taken real, human flesh using a different explanation. He was willing to concede that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary but not that He actually

2. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 182.

3. *CT*, 207.

accepted flesh from her. Rather, Christ was thought to have passed through the womb of the Blessed Mother as a ship through a canal; passing through the way but not being changed by the journey. This also denies the real meaning of dual nature by saying that the fleshly nature of Christ could not have been the product of true humanity. By asserting that Christ had a sort of heavenly body instead of earthly flesh, one is denying the possibility that Christ truly inhabited the nature of humanity and divinity.⁴

A more common and insidious heresy was that of Arius who wholly and totally denied the divine nature of Christ as distinct from the nature of any created being. This particular heresy separated the created nature of the Son and the divine nature of the Father and therefore denied the equal honor and substance of the Triune beings. Arius asserted that the divine Word which existed as part of the trinity of God was to take the place of the soul within the Son of God. As Aquinas counters, the soul is the form of the body and no material being can take on the form of a divine person.⁵ This form of being makes Christ out to be a sort of exalted creation which participates in the form of true divinity but cannot reach its perfection through the hinderance of mortal flesh.⁶ Modern commentators believe that this theory was made to protect the unity of the one God while leaning on a platonic conception of emanation. The Son of God stands as an intermediate being between the divine monad and the created world in a similar way as the platonic demiurge.⁷ Christ, in the view of Arius, is therefore not an equal member of the Trinity but rather a creation which is inescapably separated from the member of the Trinity who ensouls Him.

This however clearly contradicted the scriptural narrative and experience of the early Christians and introduced deception into the very being of Christ. To say that none of the physical events of the Bible happened in actuality is to negate their power and significance and distort the meaning of the incarnation. This great mystery of the faith gets its power from the unity of the divine and earthly in the one and whole person of Christ. To deny the veracity

4. *CT*, 208.

5. *CT*, 204.

6. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 227.

7. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 229.

of the humanity or the divinity is to divide the person of Christ into parts which cannot be done within the scope of orthodox belief.

All of these Christological heresies show a deep sympathy to the transcendent quality of God and His relationship with created matter at the expense of an openness to divine engagement with the world. A notion of transcendence helps to protect the supreme otherness of divine nature that is essential to our understanding of divinity. However, if this is allowed to overtake the sense of God's immanence to His creation then there is a danger of making the deity irrelevant to the experiential life of created beings. An overly transcendent God can be seen as nothing more than a creative force who allows chance and natural change to govern His world. This is not the idea of presence that is preached and understood in the orthodox Christian tradition and is blatantly contrary to the witness of scripture.

If Christ were truly a purely divine being, then His presence in the world is at best an illusion and at worst a hoax. For Him to have really hungered, bled, and died, Christ would need to inhabit a body in the same way as the rest of the human race.⁸ Furthermore, Christ presented Himself to the world in a human body and is, by virtue of His relationship to the divine, unable to deceive or lie. For this reason, the explanations of Mani, Valentine, and Arius fall short of explaining the truth of the essence of Christ. While each of these ideas fully accounts for the transcendent divinity of Christ, they fail to duly acknowledge His humanity.

On the other hand, there were also errors in Christology that tended to emphasize the immanent presence of God at the expense of His transcendence. These errors did not assert that the essence of humanity was unworthy of God, but instead allowed the limitations and foibles of creation to overtake the perfect divinity of the Son. This view allowed for a greater identification on the part of humanity with the divine Son, however, it did not provide room for the divine nature to exist in its wholeness. By focusing inordinately on the immanence of the divine character of the incarnation, Christ can quickly be formed in the image of an everyday man. Without the adequate presence of a transcendent and divine nature, Christ

8. *ST*, III.5.2.

becomes nothing more than an exceptional human which, while impressive and interesting, does not equate the incarnate Son of God.

The chief example of this error is the teaching of Photinus who believed that Jesus Christ came into the world as a simple and normal human being without any preexisting divinity or special mark of grace. Rather, through the practice of holy life and dutiful obedience to God in His death, Christ was able to merit adoption by God and completion in reuniting with the divine.⁹ In some ways, this seems a reasonable and orthodox position but it negates the need for a true reconciliation between God and humans. God, by an infusion of divine grace, obliterates the frail humanity of Jesus and restores Him to a place of total divinity. The person of Christ in this view does not represent a true union of divinity and humanity but rather a human raised to divinity as reward for obedience.

Photinus's view is most problematic because it makes Christ out to be nothing more than a remarkable human during His earthly ministry. This implies that there is no real barrier between the divine and human because a person can live a life worthy of divine nature. It insinuates that through proper study and work, one can merit the adoption of God and bring humanity to divine perfection. This is not simply to say that a person could achieve communion with God through their own merit, but to say that a person could be raised to the level of equality with God. If a human can truly be adopted to the level of the divine persons, God is no longer a transcendent and ineffable being as He relates to humanity and the world.

A sort of compensation for this extreme position was made in the form of Nestorianism, which believed that Christ was divine only by inspiration and not by full possession of the divine nature. Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, is often assumed to have begun and established this heretical doctrine but later scholarship has shown that his understanding and legacy was shaped by a complex theological struggle. Due to the controversy of Christology during his time and his Episcopal effort to mediate the conflict, the writings and interpretations of his thought was taken to extremes and led to a heretical and polemic tradition.¹⁰ In

9. *CT*, 202.

10. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 454.

this way, Christ was a normal human like any other but possessed supernatural power only as an extra share of the divine indwelling to which all humans lay claim by virtue of their creation. Christ, in this view, is therefore a mixture of humanity and divinity which cannot be said to fully inhabit either category. While Nestorianism was willing to concede the full humanity of Christ, he believed that Christ became divine only by the addition of grace to His mortal form. In a similar way to Photinus, this Christ is seen as an elevated human rather than a proper member of the Holy Trinity. He must therefore be only the mouthpiece and puppet of God, since He cannot act as a true agent of God by His own virtue.¹¹

Once again, this view makes Christ out to be an exceptional human being, but one that is far removed from the transcendence and otherness that is attributed to the Creator. In order to preserve the human nature of Christ with which these early theologians greatly identified, they were willing to dilute the divinity of the Son to the point where He was no longer understood as a divine being. This is equally incongruent with the scriptural account of the life of Christ as it does not acknowledge the miraculous and supernatural attributes and acts described in the Gospels. Within the narratives of scripture it is possible to find full detailed explanations of the actions of Jesus which are both essential to the human experience and obviously divine. Christ is seen both crying at the death of His friend on earth while at the same time raising that same friend to life again. It is therefore difficult to reduce that nature of Christ to one or the other or even a mixture which reduces both. Christ must fully inhabit both natures in order for Him to be the full manifestation that He was and for Him to truly bridge the gap between the created and the divine.

All of these errors are natural and understandable because of the inherent difficulty in acknowledging that two full natures can exist within the same person. This problem is compounded by the seeming mutual exclusivity of the human and divine natures. The reuniting of these two categories strains the tension which is ever-present between the transcendence and immanence of God. The only sufficient answer to the question of Christ's nature nonethe-

11. *CT*, 203.

less remains a co-existence of the two natures within the divine mystery of the Son of Man. Despite its efficacy, this answer is not simple nor easy to understand and therefore requires further elaboration.

In order to resolve this problem, Aquinas holds up the personhood of Christ as the vessel for divine and earthly unity. This is not held up in a union of addition, as was previously explained, in which an existing human is given a great share of divinity or in which divinity is given the appearance of humanity. Rather, the eternal Word which stands as a coequal member of the Trinity was made to live in a body which was not an already existent creation but was instead one truly befitting the divinity of the Son.¹² The matter of the body was ordered in perfection around a rational and full human soul at the time the divine nature assumed the nature of humanity. Because divinity exceeds the perfection of humanity, only the most perfect human could be assumed into the nature of the Son of God.¹³ Furthermore, the divine Son was not created as a being wholly different from the average and commonplace human, but was created through conception as are all members of the human race. The humanity of the Son was like unto all people and was not pre-existent nor of some super-human character. Instead, the man was created at the time of conception and assumed fully into the nature of the divine word such that both were made one.¹⁴

4.2 Dual Nature in Creation

The dominant concept of how metals are formed is what was later called “sulphur-mercury theory” by historians of science. This idea rose primarily out of the natural philosophy of Aristotle in which “sulphur” is identified with solidity and dryness whereas “mercury” is identified with what is wet and mutable. Each of these substances carries with it an opposing property which is held in balance by the other. For example, while “sulphur” is associated with mas-

12. *SCG*, IV.41.6.

13. *SCG*, IV.44.5.

14. *SCG*, IV.43.

culinity, “mercury” is associated with femininity.¹⁵ In this way, the understanding of the natural world was founded upon the categories and frameworks of theological and philosophical thought.

It is important to note that when the alchemists spoke of these substances they did not do so in the manner to which the modern scientist is accustomed. While some modern historians of esotericism believe that alchemical sulphur and mercury actually refer to their modern elemental equivalents, these substances were not understood to exist in the same way.¹⁶ Sulphur and mercury were referred to not as substances, but as principles, because the terms were not meant solely to refer to specific items but rather to concepts which are foreign to the modern scientific mind. These principles were based on the laboratory experience of the alchemist with the elemental substances that still bear the names of mercury and sulphur but these experiences were generalized and abstracted to describe a wide variety of ideas.

The concept of a pure element which is an irreducible quantity had yet to be developed, and the name of said substance did not signify its purity or composition. Contrary to contemporary understanding, one could have pure or impure mercury without acknowledging the presence of a mixture or combination of substances. By alchemical methods, both sulphur and mercury could be purified of their undesirable characteristics while still remaining within the same state of being.¹⁷ This purification represented an elevation to greater participation in its form rather than an elimination of contaminating substances. The idea of a mixture was not yet well formed and the conceptual line between discrete parts of substances did not exist. While it was widely believed that one could have an impure substance, this did not mean that said substance was understood to have distinct impurities within its composition. The platonic understanding of matter which dominated the hermetic tradition held that all things are linked to a specific form which gives them their characteristics and being. If a specific substance was understood to participate in a specific form, then it claimed that

15. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 14.

16. Newman, “Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists,” 328.

17. Newman, “Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists,” 328.

identity no matter how impaired that participation happened to be. To be impure or corrupt was a result not of the presence of a foreign substance, but rather a mark of removal from adherence to its form.

This theory of mixture is still present within Roman Catholic doctrine and liturgical practice especially as it relates to the handling of the Blessed Sacrament. For instance, if one must dispose of consecrated wine due to spoilage or spillage, it must be diluted with water to the point that it is no longer recognizable as wine. This water, though mixed with consecrated wine, is not understood to be a bearer of the presence of Christ because the species of wine is no longer discernable to the observer. This understanding is made clear within the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which instructs the priest to dissolve spilled wine in water and pour it down the sacrarium.¹⁸ The dissolution must change the presence of Christ in order to make this action permissible as it is an act punishable by excommunication to dispose of consecrated wine in the same way.¹⁹ In this view, substance is not seen as subsistent no matter the quantity or character of a thing but rather something that can be altered or obfuscated by natural processes.

This theory of contamination and mixture brings about problems and conflicts between the categories of Aristotelian and Platonic metaphysics. In one sense, the alchemical tradition leans upon the Platonic framework of form and participation in its understanding of purity and creation. Each metal retains its character by virtue of its form, but it varies in purity and outward appearance based on its degree of participation in said form. This framework crosses over with the Aristotelian categories of substance and accident which offer a different approach to understanding the nature of creation. The substance refers to the true character of an item while the accidents are those properties which are directly perceived by the senses. Within the physics of Aristotle, substance and accident are thought to be directly related such that things of like substance share similar accidental qualities. Since the alchemists believed that they could have multiple samples of one metal with different physical qualities, there was

18. Catholic Church, *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 280.

19. Catholic Church, "Code of Canon Law," 1367.

obviously a separation between these two categories posited within the alchemical world. In this way, a sort of composite theory was born which sees substance as the form in which a particular object participates and the accidents as a consequence of that participation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “the Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist.”²⁰ However, this statement requires definition of what it means for the species to subsist. Aquinas further clarified this theory of substance and divine presence in his explanation of the corruption of natural substance. He quotes Aristotle to define corruption as “movement from being to non-being” thereby implying that the substance of a thing can indeed cease to exist or be destroyed.²¹ In this way, Aquinas says that when the perceptible substance of a thing is obliterated then that thing ceases to exist. This is not to say that things cannot change in their accidents; many things change in color or in other accidental qualities while retaining their natural substance. However, if a substance is obscured to the point that it is no longer able to be detected due either to reduction in size or quality, then it can no longer adhere to the form to which its substance is tied. This means that if the consecrated wine is diluted to the point where it is indistinguishable from the water which solvates it, then the substance of wine and the presence of Christ which is tied to it ceases to exist.²²

It was not until the scientific revolution that permanence of substance was believed as a metaphysical principle. Until this realization, all things were thought to maintain their substance and being only so long as they maintained their physical and sensible characteristics. Therefore, if something was physically altered, even in a superficial or insignificant way, it was believed to have been transformed into another substance or reduced to non-being. The idea that things could exist in imperceptible quantities or forms without losing their substance led to the movement called “chemical atomism” which came about with Robert Boyle and other scientists who are associated with the founding of the modern discipline.²³ Those who fol-

20. U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1377.

21. Aristotle, *Physics*, v, quoted in *ST*, III.77.4.

22. *ST*, III.77.4.

23. Newman, “Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists,” 341.

lowed the alchemical tradition of the high middle ages generally agreed with the Thomistic view of mixture which states that individual objects lose their own substantial being if their physical properties are overtaken by the other components of the mixture.²⁴

The Latin alchemists often differed in this view from their contemporaries in philosophy and metaphysics. The high medieval alchemical tradition believed that the principles of sulphur and mercury existed without confusion or corruption within the metals such that they could later be extracted in their pure forms.²⁵ However, traditional philosophy of the time held that the metals were perfect mixtures which had their own substance and obliterated the substances of their component parts.²⁶ This difference created a point of contradiction between the esoteric and orthodox traditions and was an inconsistency within both world-views. While the orthodox theologians argued that Christ must be understood as a person of two full and whole natures which cannot be mixed or confused, they also believed that any mixture must obliterate its component parts to find a new substance. This tension was not resolved until the introduction of “chemical atomism” as the prevailing metaphysical assumption.

The metaphysical primacy of form over substance in scholastic and platonic thought was due to an understanding of the concept of “prime matter”. This mysterious substance was thought to exist in pure potentiality such that with the addition of form it could amount to any natural thing.²⁷ Thomas Aquinas was particularly friendly to this idea and argued that prime matter was a state of pure potentiality in which there is no actualization at all. This was a difficult and unpopular idea since it is a deeply platonic and seemingly contradictory idea that something could have existence in a state of pure potentiality.²⁸ Many of Thomas’s Contemporaries rejected this idea insisting upon the need for matter to contain a certain degree of actuality in order to have being in any sense. Aquinas believed that prime matter

24. Newman, “Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists,” 342.

25. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 102.

26. Newman, “Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists,” 342.

27. Pasnau, *Metaphysical themes, 1274-1689*, 35.

28. Pasnau, *Metaphysical themes, 1274-1689*, 38.

existed in a category of its own and gained actuality through the addition of form.²⁹ Being itself is a form of action in the Thomistic universe, and anything that exists is understood to have moved on from the realm of possibility. Thomas believed that it was impossible for God to create prime matter directly, because something which is purely potential could not have the quality of existence although other commentators disagree about this. Furthermore, since God is understood to be a being of pure act, it is not within His character to create something consisting of pure potentiality.³⁰

For these reasons, prime matter functions as a sort of intermediary between states of matter which does not have being by itself but is con-created with all other material things. Within the Thomistic worldview, it stands as the most irreducible form of matter while at the same time being a sort of non-existence by virtue of its potentiality. Even Thomas is unsure what to do with this particular quantity as it stands as a physical representation of the problem of possibilities and probability in God. If prime matter could have being of its own then by Thomas' own admission the created world could stand eternally changing only by differentiation of this prime matter. This was the theory of creation that dominated amongst the more platonic schools of esotericism. However, Thomas asserts that it is an article of faith and the teaching of the church that only God is eternal and that while this is a possibility it is not within the will of God as it has been revealed.³¹ In this way, the orthodox resolution to the problem of potentiality in the creation is an appeal to faith and revelation rather than philosophy and metaphysical proof.

Natural things therefore gained being and existence insofar as they adhered to a form which could order and shape its potential matter. It was an object's ability to participate in its given form that determined the degree of perfection that could be contained within it. The substance of a particular thing is donated to it by participation in one of the forms which map out the perfect being of that substance. Despite this metaphysical theory, it is not the sub-

29. Pasnau, *Metaphysical themes, 1274-1689*, 37.

30. Pasnau, *Metaphysical themes, 1274-1689*, 38.

31. *ST*, I.46.2.

stance of a thing that is sensed by the observer in the course of interaction with the world. These properties which are described through imagery and appeal to the physical senses are referred to as accidents of a thing. While accidental properties proceed from the substance of an object, they do not directly constitute or effect that same substance. Different things can have different accidental properties yet share in the same substance. For example, while there are many different types, colors, and sizes of chair, they all remain members of the same group. The substance and form of all material things are inferred by the observation of accidental properties and the logic of the observer but are not directly linked to it.³²

Philosophical mercury was seen as an exalted element which had the power to animate and create the fixed and earthly sulphur with which it comes into contact. This curious substance often described as a living metal is characterized as the animating force behind the metallic and mineral creation. Within the alchemical literature, this element is often called *argent-vive* otherwise known as quick silver. It was the unique character of this substance, known by today's chemists to be the only metal which exists as a liquid at room temperature, which intrigued the early scientists and led to its view as a divinized principle in the creation. Mercury is therefore able to form bead-like lumps and roll without leaving any of its own residue behind leading the alchemists to believe that it possessed a sort of liquid dryness.³³ Furthermore, mercury is a uniquely volatile substance, meaning that it readily transforms into a vapor, which is another quality that differentiates it from what were thought of as more earthly substances. For these reasons, mercury was thought to have particular power and importance in the alchemical art.

On the other hand, sulphur was thought to embody all that is mortal and earthly in the nature of the metals. It is sulphur that was seen as the more fixed and grounded element of the metals as opposed to the spiritualized and living qualities of mercury. Sulphur was understood as the product of the decomposition of the minerals in the core of the earth and there-

32. Pasnau, *Metaphysical themes, 1274-1689*, 115.

33. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchimia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 105

fore represented a sort of mortality within the alchemical work.³⁴ Sulphur is clearly thought of as the inferior and more corrupt of the dual principles but finds its natural opposition and mate in the aforementioned mercury.³⁵

The distinction between substance and accident becomes important in the discussion of the natures of the primary metals of the alchemical world. Each metal, while sharing the same composition and ideal form, carries different accidental qualities based upon its particular level of purity and perfection. When pure sulphur and mercury are joined, the exalted metals gold or silver are created. However, when impure sulphur and mercury come together, the base metals of lead or iron are formed.³⁶ The metals do not differ in their substance which is determined by their common form but their accidents which bring forth their diversity. This form, in its most complete manifestation, creates the pure gold which is so ardently sought by the alchemical practitioner. While the modern worldview holds that all metals and natural substances are distinct and separate species, the alchemical tradition saw all of the metals as variations on a common theme.

This theory of composition allows for an increase in purity to transform the very identity of the metals into greater and more enlightened forms. Each of the metals were given classification not only as to their physical properties but also to the spiritual and metaphysical components which were seen as an equal part of their physical being. The seven known metals formed a sort of hierarchy from the most base to the most pure and hallowed. Common metals like iron and lead were seen as the most base and impure of the natural substances as each was generated by corrupt and impure mercury and sulphur respectively.³⁷ It is the removal of corruption from these basic components which constitutes the work of the alchemist in order to bring about natural redemption within the world.

It is the belief of the alchemist that all metals desire to be gold which is the most pure and incorruptible of all the metals. However, in a world which is corrupt and fallen much

34. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 106

35. Isaac Newton, *The Commentary on the Emerald Tablet*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 246

36. Newman, "Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists," 330.

37. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 101.

diversity in the metallic world is born of impurity and poor quality.³⁸ Alchemists believed that it was the work of the practitioner to bring about the realization of each substance's true end and increasing the goodness and perfection of the created world. This perfection is increased through the creation of the medicine, called the Elixir or the Philosopher's Stone by alchemists, which is that perfect union of sulphur and mercury that can purify all that is around it.³⁹

It is important for the modern scientific mind to understand that there was no separation in the alchemical worldview between the spiritual and natural meanings of the doctrines of the art. While alchemical sulphur and mercury were understood as representations of the union of opposing forces which hold each other in balance to create matter, they were also understood as the elemental composition of all metals in a physical sense. Albert the Great proves this notion by arguing that even base iron can be converted back to the pure mercury from which it arose by removal of the sulphur which now abides within it.⁴⁰ Due to the belief of correspondence and the idea of creation through emanation, all natural things were thought to have a spiritual component and to be open to the working of the divine.

This ability to retrieve the component parts in their original form from the metals that they compose also show the true duality of nature within the metallic world. In order for pure mercury to be extracted from Gold, its nature must exist within its original form while still being a part of the unified metal. Sulphur and mercury must be understood as whole and self-sufficient parts of an equally unified single substance. The same errors which seek to conflate or overly separate the dual natures of Christ, can equally distort the sulphur-mercury theory of metals in order to resolve the apparent contradiction of dual nature. While the idea that something can be composed of two fully actualized things while still containing unity of being is largely incompatible with our modern understanding of chemical composition, it is the only philosophical construct which fully accounts for the characteristics described in the

38. Bacon and Linden, *The Mirror of Alchimy*, 4.

39. Bacon and Linden, *The Mirror of Alchimy*, 3.

40. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 102.

alchemical writings.⁴¹

This stands in contrast to the thought of Islamic alchemists like Avicenna who understood the interaction of the two principles differently. While he accepted the idea that all metals were formed from the uniting of sulphur and mercury, he did not think it possible to transmute the metals from one species to another. This is an altogether different view of the alchemical world as it foregoes the principle of transmutation. His refutation of alchemical transformation as a sort of parlor trick became famous during the middle ages and was later mistakenly attributed to Aristotle.⁴² While this was a popular view held by the Eastern and Islamic alchemical traditions, it was largely rejected by the Western and Christian alchemical schools.

Duality and opposition in union is a key idea within the thought of the hermetic tradition. It is through the uniting of opposing forces that the art of alchemy is accomplished. For example, in describing the philosopher's stone, whose synthesis is the goal of the alchemical art, Hermes Trismegistus described the union of the male Sun and the female Moon. It was through the reuniting of these binary beings that power was released and the divinising work of alchemy was accomplished.⁴³ These categories of opposing nature which are referred to as Sun and Moon are better understood as symbolic representations of the sulphur and mercury which were mentioned and explained previously. In this way, duality of nature is the primary way that the alchemical philosophers understood the composition and formation of metals and the even more precious philosopher's stone.

Through these unifications of sulphur and mercury a new thing is created which is more than the sum of two parts or a mixture thereof. The two principles have complementary yet differing qualities that serve to balance each other to varying degrees in the creation of the metals. These opposing forces create a new being in which both parts continue to exist while still bringing about a new creation.

41. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 102.

42. Avicenna, *De Congelatione et Conglutinatione Lapidum*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 98

43. Hermes Trismegistus, *The Emerald Tablet*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 28

4.3 Duality and Union

It is in the union of two unlike yet reconcilable things that exalted being was found in both the alchemical and orthodox traditions. Just as Christ is fully man and fully God uniting the divine and earthly within one being, the metals of the alchemist unite the rare and divinized mercury with the mortal and earthly sulphur to create a single substance. This joining of the divine with the earthly shows the result of the correspondences of heaven and earth and begins to cross the gap which separates the divine and the mortal. By this connection, the heavens and earth are truly linked so that what is below may be reunited with that which is above completing the cycle of exit and return that is essential to the medieval understanding of creation.

Christ is, by virtue of his divinity and humanity, the perfect union of transcendent God and the immanence of fleshly humanity. While Christ and salvation are often thought of only as they relate to the human soul, salvation can also be interpreted as reconciliation for the whole created order. As St. Paul says in the Epistle to the Romans, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now...” (Rom. 8:22 NRSV) as he speaks of the coming of Christ. It is not only the human soul which has been impaired from perfect communion with God, but also the creation which required reconciliation with the divinity from which it came. Salvation is described as “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) and all things in heaven and on earth are to be reunited under the headship of Jesus Christ. The plan of redemption is greatly limited if it is reduced to a singular focus on the human soul.⁴⁴

The results of sin and fallenness is evident within the world through its inclination toward entropy and decay. Not only do the works of people lead to the degradation of the natural order through greed and disregard for the consequences of its use, the world as it now is tends to favor disorder and chaos. The second law of thermodynamics states that all spontaneous reactions will result in an increase in disorder. Things tend to break down and fall apart if left to their own devices and rarely does something fix itself without outside intervention. While it

44. Snyder, “Salvation Means Creation Healed,” 11.

is overly anthropomorphic to say that creation itself can commit sin, it seems self-evident that it has suffered the results of human rebellion and has been distanced from the communion with God that it enjoyed at the beginning.⁴⁵ The world, through the sin of humanity, has been separated from the goodness which is the origin of the chain of being. Therefore, corruption and death has entered the natural order and interrupted its created goodness.⁴⁶ While the Christian tradition is clear on its understanding of personal and human sin, it is often unclear and vague regarding the sin and evil that affects other elements of the creation. Man is often spoken of in terms of his need for a savior but the natural order is often neglected in this area of theology.

After the judgment and the final consummation of the world, all things will be freed from decay and corruption and a new world will be instituted which is in communion with its Creator. Aquinas goes so far as to say that the world will become so united with the transcendent God that time will cease and all will exist in a state of divine incorruptibility. Time, which is the primary agent of decay, cannot be a part of the perfect God and therefore must be removed in the return of the world to communion with God.⁴⁷ If this is to be true, there must exist a divine plan for the restoration of all fallen things, not only for humanity but also for the natural order of creation.

It is the work of the Son of God to bring together the created things of the earth and the Creator who is responsible for their existence. Since, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, God remains in constant relationship with all things which have being, there must be an enduring relationship between Him and all created things both human and inanimate. Christ is seen throughout the Gospel accounts manipulating the things of nature to accomplish His will. Everything on Earth, both living and not, is subject to His power as the top of the order of processions and He transcends the entire created order. His appearance in human form allows him to make this sovereign power tangible and visible within the created world and it

45. Snyder, "Salvation Means Creation Healed," 12.

46. *ST*, I.49.1.

47. *SCG*, IV.97.2.

benefits Him as the incarnate God to exercise His power over creation.⁴⁸

This exercise of power is seen primarily in the miracles of His earthly ministry in which He healed the sick and transformed the things of nature. At the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12), Christ turned ordinary water into wine at the request of His mother showing His power over the natural order and the being of things. Furthermore, throughout his ministry, Jesus overcame the ailments and corruptions of the world in order to relieve people of their illnesses and afflictions as they met Him along the way. His power over sin and decay is most clearly seen in His resurrection which conquered even the most powerful wages of sin which is that of death. In these ways, Christ inhabited the human experience while also transcending and transforming the ills that are endemic to it due to sin and decay.

The alchemical tradition also conceived of a body which through perfect harmony of divine and mortal nature was able to divinise and redeem the natural order around it. This particular body was called the philosopher's stone and its creation was the subject of much of the alchemical literature. The stone was said not only to have the ability to turn the base metals into the finer metals of silver and gold but also to bestow long life and spiritual enlightenment to its user.⁴⁹ Its creation was the entire aim of the alchemical art and it was thought to be the one thing with the power to redeem the created order and release the divine energy that resided within it. In fact, the stone was seen as so powerful that it could overcome death itself and prolong human life to immortality. Also known as the elixir or tincture, the philosopher's stone was understood to have the power to bring about the redemption of the world such that it could be returned to the divinity from which it came.⁵⁰

Like Christ, the stone was understood to be the union of perfect earthliness and transcendent divinity in order to form a conduit between the two. Firstly, the alchemists believed that the elixir must be brought about from the same matter as the metals it sought to purify. Because the pure metals could contain nothing other than the pure sulphur and mercury that

48. *ST*, III.44.4.

49. Martin, *Alchemy & Alchemists*, 174.

50. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, 73.

formed them originally, the elixir must also be made of these same materials.⁵¹ However, the philosopher's stone is different from even gold in the exaltation and purity of the components and method by which it is formed. While it ostensibly takes the form of a normal, physical substance, the stone contains within it a union of perfect natures that is unlike all other things in the created order.⁵² By the union of these two opposing forces in their most perfect and full forms, an exulted creation is formed which has the power to bridge the gap between the mortal and divine and to bestow its benefits onto the things around it.

The stone was said to be the perfect union between feminine, white mercury which shares its correspondence with the moon and the earthly, masculine red sulphur which shares its correspondence with the sun. The analogy used most often within alchemical literature for this union is that of a marriage between the "red man" and the "white wife" who join to become impregnated with the perfect work of the alchemist. This union is seen to be so complete as to make the two to be one body and one substance standing in perfect unity despite the presence of divergent and complementary natures.⁵³ While these two are then considered joined in such a way as to be inseparable, they maintain their individual properties keeping each other in perfect balance.

This same idea of material wedding is seen within the liturgy of the mass during the preparation of the chalice at the offertory. During this portion of the mass the chalice is filled not only with wine but also with water to create a mixture of two substances which come together in symbolism of balance and unity. Through mixture neither the wine nor water entirely loses its contribution to the whole, but each come together in an inseparable form. In this we see the humanity which is symbolized by common water and the divinity symbolized by precious wine brought together into a unity which comes to be greater than either simple substance. It is only within this unity that the fallen people are united to Christ and the chasm between divinity and mortality is able to be crossed.⁵⁴

51. Bacon and Linden, *The Mirror of Alchimy*, 6.

52. Bacon and Linden, *The Mirror of Alchimy*, 9.

53. Roger Bacon, *Radix Mundi*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 115

54. *ST*, III.74.6.

The parallel between the dual natures of Christ and the composition of the metals is not perfect but it does show the influence of the Christian tradition upon the growth of esotericism. It is possible to make an argument that the union in the sulphur-mercury theory is closer to a nestorian conception of dual nature as it seems that through mixture each loses its full self-sufficiency. Despite this possibility, both the use of wedding imagery and the belief that both the original mercury and the original sulphur are above to be extracted from the formed metals seem to counter this objection. Just as the bride and groom in a marriage become one while still maintaining their own identity and being, so the two alchemical principles unite to create the philosopher's stone.

In both the dual natures of Christ and the duality of the sulphur-mercury theory greater being is gained through the uniting of seemingly opposing ideas. In the combination of two separate entities, the gap between them is lessened and a reconciliation between the two is achieved. Just as the union between the two natures of Christ helps to bridge the gap between the transcendent holiness of God and the fallen mortality of man, so the union of exalted mercury and earthly sulphur creates that which can enliven and redeem the creation. It is this union between the transcendent and the immanent which enables the transformation which is the trademark of the alchemical ethos.

Chapter 5

Sacramental Transformation

The most notable and universally known image of alchemy in the popular culture is that of the mysterious transmutation of metals. People envision the dark and mysterious worker, dwelling in a basement laboratory, working through mystical processes to create that most precious substance from the base metals of everyday things. However, these images are often used to evoke an idea of alchemy which is a caricature of the actual beliefs of the medieval esotericists. Accepting a worldview of divine infusion and correspondence in which the divine and mortal are allowed and created to intermingle, the practitioners of the alchemical arts believed their work to be a natural part of their interaction with the world. Being a people far more open to the intervention of divine and transcendent forces within the everyday circumstances of their lives, the medieval faithful were wholly open to the idea of alchemical transformation.

This openness can be attributed to the dominant image and metaphor of the medieval Christian tradition which is the sacrament of the Eucharist. The mysterious reverence of the mass, which was the defining ceremony and image of the Catholic faith throughout the history of the church, created an openness to the tangible and real presence of God within the natural order. Eucharistic presence was seen as far greater and more real than a philosophical understanding of a transcendent presence, but is instead a sort of second incarnation which once again brings the real and physical presence of Christ into the reach of our senses and perception. It is therefore natural to extend this understanding to other parts of the physical

world through the use of similar divine invocation as one would see in the ceremony of the mass.

The ceremonies and traditions of the mass were further mystified by the confinement of their detailed explanation and understanding to the domain of the clergy. The Roman Canon was recited primarily in the secret voice with the priest facing the altar and reredos on the east wall. It was not within the reach of the average layman of the medieval church to understand or know the words of the Eucharistic prayer, let alone the theology which developed to understand its significance. This ignorance allowed for many diverse superstitions and theories to develop among the laity regarding the host and its origin and qualities. Nearly the whole of lay participation in the sacrament was the act of gazing upon the elevated host signaled by the ringing of a bell and the upstretched arms of the priest.¹ At most celebrations of the mass, only the cleric was seen as worthy of partaking of the elements and did so vicariously for the salvation of all assembled.² The work of the church in its primary sacrament quickly became its own sort of esoteric practice, not only prone to misunderstanding but also incredible dominance in the divine imagination of the medieval Christians.

5.1 Transubstantiation and the Eucharistic Miracle

Although the ceremonies and sacrament of the eucharist had been well established by the time of scholasticism, as it became more central to the Christian experience more and more questions began to arise regarding the mechanics of this particular miracle. While it was taken as undeniable fact that Christ was wholly present within the matter of the eucharist, exactly how and when this transformation took place was far from clear or understood. No longer was it sufficient to believe that it was an entirely mysterious and hidden process which brought about the presence of Christ; rather the church felt the need to understand how this amazing mystery fit into the rest of the laws of the created order. A particular fascination of

1. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 59.

2. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 50.

this movement was what exactly constituted the moment of change between the sole presence of ordinary bread and that of the body of Jesus Christ. If a priest suddenly died without finishing the whole of the Roman Canon, was the host still just ordinary bread or had it unknowingly become the body even by the action of a portion of the mass?³ A vast amount of theorizing then began to surround the devotion to the sacred eucharist and a sacramental theology was developed.

Addressing the time of the consecration, there were multiple opinions each focusing on a different hinge moment of the ceremony and prayers. Despite these disagreements, the point of greatest focus was appropriately on the words of Christ said by the priest in remembrance and recreation of the last supper. The priest stood *in persona Christi* thereby calling upon the same words and actions of the Christ they represent to bring about the miracle of the mass. Among the oldest theories regarding this question was that of Peter Comestor who said of Jesus: “He said that when all is said, all is done.” By this assertion, only after all the words of Christ were proclaimed by the priest, both those regarding the bread and the cup, were the bread and wine fully transformed to become the body and blood. However, this posed the question of how the bread could exist as the body while the wine stood on the altar waiting to become the blood. Could Christ actually exist solely under one species or as body without blood? This was seen as impossible because it would constitute the division of the being of Christ in a way that would not be faithful to His original nature. For this reason, the church adopted the doctrine of concomitance to account for the total and full presence of Christ within both of the individual Eucharistic species.⁴

Concomitance was an Aristotelian term and idea which was brought into the consciousness of scholastic Christianity through the work of Avicenna. It describes the intrinsic link between a certain object to something which is normally considered to be outside of its own essence. By this doctrine, when the bread is transformed into the body of Christ, the full body and blood are present within that same species without division or separation. Despite the

3. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 54.

4. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 54.

fact that the essence of the bread and its purpose in the sacrament is to be the body of Christ, the essence of the blood must also be present within the same matter in order for it to fully represent Christ.⁵ In practical application of this doctrine, communion in both kinds was discouraged and in large part discontinued amongst the laity and only the host was administered to the faithful the few times a year that they would be disposed to partake. This is seen within the admonitions of Robert Pullen who declared that only bread should be given to the faithful because “He does not show himself well who when he gives the flesh dips it in the blood; as if the flesh lacks the blood, or the blood exists outside the flesh.”⁶ In this way, the being of one object was understood to incorporate within itself the being of another so as to embody something greater and more complete than what it can by virtue of its own essence.

The idea of concomitance extended further within the scholastic understanding of the Eucharistic transformation in order to make sense of the physical complications of such a miracle. The transformation of the sacred host and wine into the body and blood of the one and risen Christ posed several metaphysical and logical problems for the systematic theologian who sought to explain this mystery of the church. For example, if there is only one Christ who has ascended to heaven to dwell until the day of judgment, then it would seem impossible for Him to be truly present on all the altars of the church where mass is being celebrated at any given time. It is an almost unquestioned philosophical assumption that one thing cannot be in two places at once and that two separate things cannot occupy the same physical location at the same time. The establishment of these two principles make the sacrament that much harder to explain in a coherent fashion and therefore, certain metaphysical linkages must be asserted in order to resolve this contradiction.⁷

These metaphysical assumptions take the form of multiple instances of concomitance and presence “by the power of the sacrament” as Aquinas understands it. There is a difficult and important distinction in this formula between the accidental and substantive properties of

5. *ST*, III.76.2.

6. Robert Pullen, *Sententiae*, quoted in Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 71

7. Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 86.

both the body of Christ and the bread of the Eucharist which is used to resolve this tension. At the time of consecration, the accidents of the bread remain while the substance to which they adhere is transformed wholly into the body of the risen Christ. This is not to say that the presence of the bread is totally annihilated but rather wholly changed to become something else by the sovereign power of God.⁸ However, as stated before, this change cannot bring with it the entirety of the body of Christ as it is obvious to any observer that the matter of the host still appears to the senses as the bread that was originally brought to the altar. It is here where Thomas makes a firm distinction regarding what qualities and properties of Christ are made present in the host “by the power of the sacrament.”⁹

By this logic, one can assert that the substantive and formal properties of the divine Son are present within the matter of the sacrament while the dimensive and accidental properties are not conjured by the act of the priest. In this way, Christ’s body is present within the bread and wine according to its substance and form but not according to its accidental properties by which the human senses understand it. Thomas supports this concept by citing the words of Christ during the last supper which is seen as the institution of the eucharistic sacrament. Noting that Christ says “*This* is my body” rather than “*Here* is my body”, Aquinas asserts that Christ did not mean to communicate that his physical qualities would be available by participation in the sacrament.¹⁰ Because Christ is not present in quantitative or locative senses through the sacrament, He is therefore able to be present in many places and instances simultaneously without violating the laws of locality.¹¹ Eschewing the literal presence of the Body of Christ on the altar, many of these physical difficulties were able to be avoided and the way was opened for a plausible view of the Eucharistic presence.

With the avoidance of the physical and quantitative problems of the transformation comes the problem of how presence in substance only can be properly understood. Aquinas asserts that the rest of the qualities and parts of the real body of Christ are present within the sacra-

8. Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 89.

9. Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 93.

10. Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 91.

11. Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 95.

ment through natural concomitance. Because the substance of the Body of Christ is inexorably linked with His accidental qualities, even when only the substance is present by the power of the sacrament the accidents are there, at least in a non-literal sense.¹² This allows the transformation of the bread and wine to be complete while not fully recognizing the physical results through the senses.

Having solved the problems of location and physicality within the sacramental transformation, one must still identify the efficient cause of this divine action. While the transformation is obviously one born from power much greater than that of mortal man, it still seems to come about through the actions of human clergy by the action of the Christian liturgy. It would be a violation of divine sovereignty to say that the actions of the mass coerce God into accomplishing this miracle, but it is also inconsistent with the teaching and tradition of the church to say that the mass is only valid on occasion or when the stars align properly. Furthermore, if a priest is personally in a state of sin and is in impaired relationship with God, one can raise a question as to whether or not he would be able to bring the body of Christ in the power of that same relationship. God most certainly accomplishes the miracle of the Eucharist each time it is performed, but this is not to say that the priest has the power to bring this about by himself.

Regarding the person to whom the power of this sacrament is entrusted, Thomas Aquinas is very clear in his explanation. The Eucharistic sacrifice is solely the domain of the priestly ministry by God's own establishment. Priesthood is the state which constitutes the ability to stand *in persona Christi* and work in the power of Christ insofar as it has been delegated by God and His church. This power is delegated by the sacrament of ordination to those who validly undergo it so that it may be used for the accomplishment of God's goals on earth.¹³ As an indelible mark upon the soul of the receiver, the grace of ordination grants a share in the priesthood and divinity of Christ. This allows the priest to carry out the sacraments which were established by God and the church for the benefit of the world and the faithful. Without

12. Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist*, 96.

13. *ST*, III.82.1.

this power, a person is unable to accomplish these works as they are done through the power of God in man.

The priest does not enact the transformation of the bread and wine through his own power or ability but by that which is delegated by Christ to the church. By the dispensing of this grace, God has promised to be present within the sacraments of the church in order to benefit the members of that body. This principle is best shown within the work of Aquinas regarding the question of a sinful priest who celebrates the Eucharist. It is a reasonable assumption to say that a priest in a state of sin which separates him from the love of God cannot feasibly consecrate the Eucharist. When a person is sinful and notoriously so, it is only natural to see them as less of a conduit of grace than someone who is of a more unassailable reputation. However, it is undeniable that within the history of the Christian church that many people in Holy Orders have committed grievous sins and found themselves unworthy of the office of the priesthood. This begins to pose a question as to whether the priest calls upon his own power or that of divine grace when he consecrates the host.

Thomas resolves this issue by asserting that the priest does not call upon his own power when celebrating the mass and is therefore personally irrelevant to the work being done in the sacrament. It is the grace conferred at ordination by the Episcopal laying on of hands which functions to accomplish the transformation of the Eucharistic species and not the skill or merit of the priest himself.¹⁴ He even goes so far as to assert that the mass given by a sinful priest is no better or worse than that offered by a saintly priest because the minister works only in the place and power of Christ.¹⁵ The order of the mass also helps to emphasize this fact not only in the use of the words of Christ to accomplish the transformation but also by the invocation of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this sacrament and to make the people worthy to receive it.¹⁶ While an unorthodox belief of popular piety began to attribute the act of transformation to the power of the priesthood, it is only through the power of Christ that

14. *ST*, III.82.5.

15. *ST*, III.82.6.

16. "Order of Mass."

this miracle is made possible.

This principle that the validity of the sacrament does not depend on the worthiness of the minister came to be known as *ex opere operato*. It was important to affirm that the power of the Eucharistic miracle comes from the power of Christ and not the power of the minister in order to avoid adopting a sense of magic into the theology of the church. The metaphysical action is accomplished in total through the power of Christ who established the practice and commanded that it be done in remembrance of Him. Furthermore, the change which is accomplished is entirely metaphysical and not to be understood as a physical change which is perceptible by the bodily senses. It is through changed adherence of the matter of the bread and wine to the substance of a new and divine form that the bread and wine come to embody the whole of the body and blood of Christ for the believer who participates in the sacrament. Christ makes this transformation possible by His power and through this miracle allows for the divinization of the matter which makes up the foundation of human life.

5.2 The Alchemical Eucharist

Transformation is also a guiding image and metaphor for the work of the alchemical tradition which seeks to divinise and elevate the base metals of lead and steel to the purer metals of silver and gold. This work was seen as an extension of divine power on the part of the practitioner who is able to manipulate the laws and systems of God in order to accomplish this elevation. The work of the alchemist was done not only for the monetary gain of the patron and practitioner but was also seen as a participation in the plan and workings of God for the betterment of the entire created order. Therefore, it was believed that through proper study and knowledge of the laws of the universe and the alchemical art that a skilled master could perform transmutations and alter the form of the universe at will. While such work is a participation in the work of Christ and God in the natural order, it is done not through the direct power of Christ but rather through revelation of secrets that allow the alchemist to gain a sort

of divine power for himself.

In the *Mirror of Alchemy*, Roger Bacon says that “God hath given to nature a strait way, to wit, continuall concoction, and you like fooles despise it, or else know it not.”¹⁷ He believed that the secrets and laws which governed the natural order were given by God in a way that was discernible and apprehensible to the well-studied human such that all who dedicated themselves to the work were able to understand them. This is not to say that these laws were believed to be easy or readily apparent, but through diligent work and study it was thought that a man could gain mastery over them in order to bend and manipulate nature to his will according to their principles. Alchemical and esoteric knowledge gave the power to the practitioner and through virtue of that sacred knowledge the work is accomplished for the improvement of creation. It was an act of discipleship and study to learn the art which would allow and merit one to accomplish the transmutation of the metals and the creation of the Elixir and few are reported to have reached this goal. To be a proper practitioner of alchemy was to become so intimately acquainted with the laws and movements of nature that one could rise above them and find dominion over them. The science of alchemy is therefore the use of natural processes and knowledge to bring about the improvement and transformation of the things of this world.¹⁸

The alchemists still believed that great faith was required for the work to be accomplished but they thought of this in a way markedly different from the understanding of Christianity. While Christians believed that faith was necessary to participate in the work which God was doing and had done throughout history, the alchemist believed that faith in the laws and principles of alchemy were necessary to establish the diligence and understanding which brought about knowledge and enlightenment. Since the secrets of the work were believed to be revealed gradually through study and experiment and not by the simple transmission of secrets between workers, it was necessary that the one who desired to learn all of the secrets must have the belief in the process necessary to understand what he has already learned and to

17. Bacon and Linden, *The Mirror of Alchemy*, 10.

18. Bacon and Linden, *The Mirror of Alchemy*, 3.

press on for further understanding. Albert the Great says that many who sought the enlightenment of the art were quickly dissuaded because of the hidden nature of the work and the imperfections of their techniques or the matter of their work.¹⁹ Worse still in his estimation were those who upon losing belief in the effectiveness of the transformative art began to deceive themselves and others by faking the effects of transmutation in order to gain fame and recognition.²⁰ If one was to fully understand the laws of the universe which constituted the secrets of the alchemist, one must start by believing in the possibility of the transformation and the merit of the work to be done.

There is a sense of divinity within this faith, but it is not the type of active and living divinity that is the foundation of the orthodox faith. While the alchemist believes that he is participating in the work of God through his purification and elevation of the natural order, he believes that this is done under his own power which grows by his knowledge of those divine principles and laws. The knowledge of the alchemical art comes not through the direct illumination of God but rather through the study of the laws of nature and the wisdom which is implanted in the creation.²¹ Because of the relationship between God and His creation enumerated earlier, it was believed that one could discern knowledge of God and His laws and intentions through the study of the beings which emanated from Him. The practitioner of alchemy is seen as a sort of priest ordained to assist in the work of nature by virtue of his knowledge and faith in the work.²² It is as if God set out a difficult path upon which the student of alchemy is invited to ascend in order to gain the knowledge which unlocks the workings of the universe and brings the created being closer to the creator. Therefore, God does not restrict the work of transformation solely to His own power as is shown in the Eucharistic miracle, but opens the invitation for the human to participate and learn this power for himself so that he may grow in his agency over the created order.

It is directly affirmed that it is nature which holds the keys to accomplishing the trans-

19. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 100.

20. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 100.

21. Roger Bacon, *Radix Mundi*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 113.

22. Roger Bacon, *Radix Mundi*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 112.

formation just as it is nature that made the metals. The alchemists are “no more than meer servants in the work.”²³ However this statement seems to personify the idea of nature as a sort of deity within itself. Nature then is the animating force behind the interaction of man and the world and which allows for the work of the alchemist to take place by establishing the processes in which they participate. Unlike the God of the orthodox tradition, this divine conception invites the follower into greater and greater states of elevation so that he may seek near equality with it in power. Bacon is careful not to allow the possibility of a person becoming truly equal in power with the governing force of the universe, but does allow that one can gain a level of mastery of it that would seem like a sort of divine authority. By submitting to the laws and principles of the alchemical work, the practitioner is offered an opportunity to rise above their place in the creation and to go from being governed by the workings of the natural world, to being a sort of governor himself. Yet this mastery is still a lesser sort of divinity, as true mastery is reserved to the One who created the entire world and is nature in Himself.

Because the work is accomplished not by pure divine power but by the learning and skill of the practitioner, there is a greater emphasis within this transformation on the worthiness and ability of the worker. An alchemist showed his authority and dignity not through pious obedience or holiness of life as one would expect of a cleric, rather he gained notoriety by his ability to succeed in transmutation and mastery of the secret processes of the art. The alchemical tradition put great weight upon the writings and teachings of those who were thought to have mastered the art and succeeded in the work and their words were considered as holy scripture to other students of the discipline.²⁴ Since the goal of alchemical study was to gain greater and greater understanding of the principles and knowledge which undergirded the work, the writings and figures of those who were seen as masters were invaluable in passing on the knowledge which had been gained. Particular people were seen as particularly adept due not only to their natural predisposition to achievement in the art but by their in labor to

23. Roger Bacon, *Radix Mundi*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 112.

24. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 22.

understand the principles of the work.

In alchemical thought, the transformation of the base metals was accomplished through purification of the component sulphur and mercury in order to yield a more complete dual form. Because the base metals were composed of impure sulphur and mercury that were hindered from achieving their perfect forms, it is through elimination of these impurities that an elevation of being is bestowed upon the metals. This purification took various physical forms in the alchemical laboratory consisting primarily of operations which burned and degraded the base metal which served as the starting material for the work. Often through extreme heating and dissolution, the original substance would be reduced to an ash or powder which was believed to be the purer remnants of the starting material. The vapors which were released during this process were thought to contain much of the impure and hindering elements of the material which were eliminated in this process.²⁵

Each of the alchemical processes had the overarching theme of purification through removal of impurity and isolation of more perfect component parts. Each involved the addition of heat which would decompose the matter of the work and remove whatever properties were seen as hindrances to the realization of the royal metals. One of these processes was Sublimation which sought to remove moisture from the composition of a substance which was seen as an impure property. Albert the Great described this moisture being driven out of the substance by heat and allowed to cling to the sides of the glass container leaving behind a more pure and dry substance in the middle of the vessel.²⁶ Modern chemists would identify this process as evaporation which removes those elements of a dry mixture which vaporize at increasing temperatures. This is usually done to drive off water which has become incorporated into a substance or other liquid contaminants which may have been added to a product for other purposes. These substances through heating would then condense on the cooler glass and appear as the leaving spirits which the alchemists describe in this process. However, when the alchemist separated these impurities from the metals they did not conceive of

25. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 102.

26. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 106.

them as different substances but rather as impediments within the same metal that hindered its full participation in its greater form.

Similar processes existed for the removal of different properties from the metals which were seen as impurities keeping them from realizing their intended being as silver or gold. However, as heat, and therefore energy, is added to any substance, the probability of what modern chemists refer to as “side reactions” increases greatly and allows for the actual composition of the matter being heated to change. This change would cause great differences in physical properties to appear in the supposedly purifying metals therefore causing a problem for the alchemist who sought to obtain very specific products through their work. For this reason, the alchemists also had varying ideas of what the physical properties of silver and gold might be when created through alchemical processes. While they believed that these products were certainly real gold and not an imitation, they also believed that they had properties and powers not innate to the gold and silver which was formed through natural processes. For example, alchemical gold was thought to be even greater than gold which came from nature and was able to be used to create medicines that could cure all ailments.²⁷ Likewise, alchemical iron was said to be unattracted to a magnet which leads the modern chemist to wonder whether or not it was an oxide or other compound which was created through the alchemical purifications.²⁸

This idea that the alchemical versions of the metals could retain their true form and substance while being different in accidental properties allows for the transformation of the metals without the necessary ability for the lay observer to recognize the change. While some may see this as proof of the falseness of the alchemical art, it is fully within the thought world of medieval philosophy to allow for change in substance and form without perfectly corresponding changes in accident. This sort of natural yet miraculous change sprung from the divinely infused world of the alchemist and opened the possibility of an interaction with an animated world.

27. Osler, *Reconfiguring the World*, 23.

28. Albertus Magnus, *Libellus de Alchemia*, quoted in Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, 105.

5.3 Christ the Philosopher's Stone

The person of Christ became, especially among the English reformers, the most important metaphor for the Eucharistic transformation and the spiritual work of the Christian life. It is universally accepted that some change needs to occur to bring the fallen world back into full communion with the God who created it, and it is in the person of Christ that the hope for this change is grounded. By uniting the physical and spiritual in a union of perfect duality, Christ opens the door to the transformation of both for the edification of all. Within alchemical Christian writings, Christ is represented by a geometric creation called the “squaring of the circle” in which the spirit represented by a circle was united in the same space with the square which represented matter.²⁹ The alchemists believed that only through full participation in both the earthly and divine could the fallen nature of the world be interrupted and allowed to ascend to a greater and more complete being in line with the original intention of Creation. As Lancelot Andrewes says while speaking of Christ and the Blessed Sacrament, “there is a recapitulation of all in Heaven and Earth in Christ, so there is a recapitulation of all in Christ in the Holy Sacrament.”³⁰ By the incarnation of the divine in the great gift of God, one person is able to embody the true reconciliation between the divine and mortal and grant the possibility of this same reconciliation to continue in the world which inherits that gift.

In the Eucharistic transformation of the bread and the wine, the gifts which were given by God to His people for the nourishment of their bodies is elevated to be the very body and blood of Christ which nourish not only the body but also the soul and spirit of the recipient. Within the orthodox tradition this is accomplished by the annihilation of the substance of bread and wine that they may be exchanged with the substance of Christ Himself so that it is no longer earthly food which sits on the altar but the real and full body of Christ. However, in the view of the alchemist this elevation is accomplished not through the removal of the natural substance of the bread and wine but by purifying them and allowing them to regain

29. Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 45.

30. More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 308.

full union with the God from whom they gain their being. Christ, who is the perfect union of God and mortal flesh is the perfect example of this reuniting of the mortal and divine, prefigures this transformation and enables all who follow Him and know His teachings to carry on in the work of transforming the world. Andrewes once again captures this Christocentric understanding of the Eucharistic presence with Christian orthodoxy by arguing that in the transformed elements the sign and the thing signified dwell together as the two natures of Christ.³¹

Both alchemical and eucharistic imagery were brought together in later mystical writings in order to exemplify this unification of God and world in the person of Christ. For example, multiple books were published by German mystics which constituted a sort of alchemical missal blending together the imagery and actions of the traditional Roman Rite with images and principles of the alchemical tradition. The Eucharist in this view became a sort of metaphysical chemistry enacted by the hand of the one who could understand the mysteries, not solely through the power of the spirit but also through careful manipulation of nature according to the secrets learned in alchemical practice.³² Celebrating the mass became not a prayer to God for His action in the world as He promised to His church, but rather a sort of secret discipline which could be learned and used for the manipulation of the world and the divine. Much of the imagery in these books blended together the understanding of alchemical processes with biblical theology to put forth a sort of natural interpretation of the faith.

In this view, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as propitiation for sin was not the foremost redemptive act of the incarnation but rather Christ's life as the perfect man accomplished the reconciliation of the world and God. The union of frail flesh and divine perfection was seen as paramount in the understanding of salvation and some later thinkers went so far as to say that Christians must be the physical offspring of Christ bearing within them His literal body and blood.³³ The salvific act was no longer Christ's bearing of the punishment of God on the

31. More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, 309.

32. Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 40.

33. Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 38.

behalf of humanity, but rather His ability to unleash and cultivate the deposit of divinity within all created beings so that they may reach full unity with God as Christ has it. Apocalyptic imagery and texts were also popular within the alchemical devotions for this reason as true salvation was seen as the creation of a new Earth and Heaven which were no longer separated by impurity and imperfection.

One particular alchemical image which illustrates this principle is a depiction of Christ with the Virgin Mary standing between the moon and sun. The earliest example of this image can be found in the work *Das Buch von der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* but various interpretations of it can be found throughout alchemical works of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.³⁴ The Virgin Mary stands in the position described in the canonical apocalyptic texts of Revelation 12 perched upon the overturned crescent moon with the sun and stars above her head gazing upon the Christ to whom she gave birth. In the alchemical tradition this image depicted Mary uniting the philosophical principles of Sulphur or Sol, which was symbolized by the Sun, and Mercury or Luna, which was symbolized by the moon, to create the perfect union of the principles exemplified by Christ. Christ, who is in this image the philosopher's stone created by the work of Mary, is then able to defeat the dragon of impurity and imperfection through the transformative power of the perfectly united sulphur and mercury.

Because of this type of exegesis and symbolism within alchemical writing and its prominence during the time of many English writers, the image of Christ as philosopher's stone became a popular devotion in the Christian tradition. In the poem "The Elixir" by Anglican Priest George Herbert, Christ and His presence in the sacrament are extolled as the tincture which can transform even the most base thing into something "bright and clean."³⁵ As the one who divinizes the common and base, Christ is able to make anything done for His sake into an experience of divine grace and joy. John Donne goes even farther in his poem "Resurrection (imperfect)" by describing the death and resurrection of Christ as a grand transmutation for

34. Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 41.

35. Herbert, *The Complete English Poems*, 174.

the redemption of the whole world.³⁶ Christ who died as pure gold in perfect innocence, was then raised as a pure tincture capable of redeeming and transforming the whole of the world into that same perfection.

Christ is therefore, in both the alchemical and orthodox traditions, the instrument of transformation which enables all things both physical and spiritual to reunite with the Divine Creator in a new and more perfect creation. However, within the more mystical strains of the alchemical tradition this work is not done solely by Christ but is left for the human to learn and study so that the divine ways of the universe can be used and manipulated by the practitioner. This is not to say that this manipulation was to be done for bad or selfish ends on the part of the alchemist, but rather that the miracle of Christ was not a wholly transcendent thing but rather a part of the natural scheme in which humans are immersed. The unity of God and world which was accomplished in Christ is the primary mystery which allows for the transformation of the natural world into new being which is in perfect unity with the Divine nature from which it originally proceeds.

36. Donne, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 518.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In the medieval Christian world it was natural to approach scientific and physical inquiry from a worldview deeply shaped by the western Christian tradition. Because Christian practice and belief constituted the most fundamental mental furniture of the medieval culture, if any new discovery was to be believed it must fit within the overarching theological framework which was already established. It was a default assumption of the Middle Ages that the Creator still affected the creation, and that knowledge of the creation could not help but bear images and imprints of the character of the Creator.

This deeply engrained Christian ethos led to the use of Christian distinctions and beliefs as a lens through which to interpret the movements and properties of the natural world. Because it was taken as a self-evident premise that the God of Christianity created the world, it was understood that whatever was true in the heavenly sphere would be true, at least in a participatory fashion, in the earthly sphere. It was this theologically informed naturalism which gave birth to the earliest forms of the scientific disciplines which are so familiar today. The traditions which were later called esoteric, as the scientific consensus began to move away from the Christian tradition, were born as an application of the study of the church to the discovery and exploration of the creation.

This correlation between the two traditions is firstly seen in the esoteric idea of correspondence which sees all creation and existence occupying places in a long chain of being which both extends down to the diversity of the created world and seeks to be reunited with

its source. Just as the Thomistic picture of the universe casts the whole of creation as being on a journey of procession from and return to God, the alchemist believes that all things are connected on an intrinsic level to the divine and have both a divine imprint in their being and a final cause that seeks even greater unity with that point of divine emanation. While Thomas would say that it is the work of the reconciling Christ and His church to bring about this return to God, the alchemist believed that by his work and cooperation in the processes of nature that he could facilitate this new creation and bring even greater divinity to the natural world. The world of the Middle Ages was a sacramental place in which all things bore an openness to divine action and in which man interacted with the divine and natural simultaneously. God therefore remained both transcendent and immanent being both the source of all things and that which directly animates them.

Another correlation is found when evaluating the way in which the medieval philosophers understood the composition of matter, especially the metals which constituted the majority of the alchemist's work. Like Christ, the metals were seen as being composed of two natures in union to create a new being greater and different than the two parts alone. Within the fallen creation, these unions were imperfect and the natures contained in them were inhibited from their full potential existence. When these two natures or principles were perfected and brought together, they did not simply make another metal but the perfect creation which is able to redeem all other substances that encountered it. Just as Christ was the redeemer of humanity being composed fully of perfect divinity and perfect mortality in order to redeem and help others in their return to God, so the Philosopher's stone was thought to be the perfect unity of the earthly principles for the divinization of the creation. The reconciliation of the opposing principles of the world creates opportunity for the redemption of all things and the fulfillment of their full reunion with the divinity that created them and draws them to return.

The work of alchemy, as demonstrated from these two founding principles, is to transform the things of the world so that they may realize their full potential being which is the restoration of union with the divine source of being. This mirrors the sacramental understanding of

the Eucharist in which God is made present within the physical world by the consecration of the created bread and wine. The bread and wine, which were created for the nourishment of the body, are elevated to nourish the soul and spirit as well by greater participation in the source of their being which is God. In the same way, the base metals are elevated to their more royal and divine forms through the work of the alchemist for the betterment of the creation and the redemption of the world. Because the Eucharist was the paradigmatic way in which God established divine interaction with the matter of creation, it naturally became the paradigm for the earliest forms of scientific interaction with that same creation. However, the alchemical tradition took the paradigm of the Eucharist too far and thereby sought to manipulate and control the mechanisms of the creation rather than accepting the total sovereignty of God.

It is clear from the similarities between the foundational ideas of the alchemical worldview and the neoplatonism which influenced the scholasticism of the medieval university that the two schools of thought affected each other in an intimate way. While the alchemical school departed from that of orthodox Christian theology as it leaned on platonism to force theological distinctions onto the natural world, the beginning point was the framework created by the church for the understanding of the Creator and the sacraments. The unity of science and belief at this time created one unified worldview in which natural and theological knowledge were not of differing character but were mutually informative spheres of the intellectual union of man with God. The sense of divine presence in the physical universe was a strong cultural assumption during the Middle Ages before the separation of religious thought to the sphere of cerebral and philosophical dialog. That openness allowed for a divinely infused and informed type of natural philosophy in which the faithful sought to commune with and interact with the divine presence that they encountered in nature.

After the enlightenment and the changed focus on human reason and experience, the natural sciences began to become separated from the theological disciplines such that there began to be a larger chasm between the transcendent God and the physical world. This is not

to say that science and religion became contradictory or necessarily opposed as the clergy of the Church have been great proponents of scientific exploration from the formation of the universities. It is a caricature of the esoteric and early scientific traditions to say that they were unreasonable or anti-intellectual, rather they had a starting point in Christian premises which would be incomprehensible to the modern secular world. While science and religion are thought of as separate spheres of knowledge in today's world, within the framework of medieval Christianity they were partners in the search for knowledge of Creator and creation.

Bibliography

- Adams, Marilyn McCord. *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham*. Reprint edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, October 12, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-19-965816-9.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Compendium of Theology*. Translated by Richard J. Regan. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-19-538530-4.
- . *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Four: Salvation*. Translated by Charles J. O’Neil. Vol. 4. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975. ISBN: 978-0-268-01675-3.
- . *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Two: Creation*. Translated by James F. Anderson. Vol. 2. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975. ISBN: 978-0-268-01675-3.
- . “Summa Theologica.” Dominican House of Studies: Priory of the Immaculate Conception. Accessed January 18, 2018. <http://dhsPriory.org/thomas/summa>.
- Bacon, Roger, and Stanton J. Linden. *The Mirror of Alchimy: Composed by the Thrice-Famous and Learned Fryer, Roger Bachon*. Garland reference library of the humanities v. 1031. New York: Garland Pub, 1992. ISBN: 978-0-8240-8398-4.
- Boersma, Hans. *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*. First Edition. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, February 1, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6542-7.
- Bonin, Thérèse M. *Creation as Emanation: The Origin of Diversity in Albert the Great’s On the Causes and the Procession of the Universe*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000. ISBN: 978-0-268-02351-5.
- Catholic Church. “Code of Canon Law.” Accessed March 13, 2018. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P52.HTM.
- , ed. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Liturgy Documentary Series 14. Washington, D.C: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-60137-176-8.
- “Council of Chalcedon | Christianity.” Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed February 22, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Council-of-Chalcedon>.
- Courvoisier, Jaques. *Zwingli, a Reformed Theologian*. Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures 1961. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963.

- Davies, Brian, and Eleonore Stump, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*. Oxford handbooks. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-19-532609-3.
- Donne, John. *The Complete Poems of John Donne*. Edited by Robin Robbins. Longman Annotated English poets. Harlow, England ; New York: Longman, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-4082-3124-1.
- Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. *The Western Esoteric Traditions: a Historical Introduction*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-19-532099-2.
- Grillmeier, Alois. *Christ in Christian Tradition*. Vol. 1. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. ISBN: 0-0842-0492-6.
- . *Christ in Christian Tradition*. Vol. 2. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975. ISBN: 0-8042-0492-6.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Google-Books-ID: 48Lgg5fa78oC. Cambridge University Press, January 19, 2012. ISBN: 978-1-139-50400-3.
- Hart, David Bentley. *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*. In collaboration with Proquest ebrary Academic Complete eBook Collection and EBSCO Academic Complete eBook Collection. OCLC: 593321351. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-300-15564-8.
- Heisenberg, Werner. *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*. World Perspectives v.15. London: Allen & Unwin, 1959.
- Herbert, George. *The Complete English Poems*. Edited by J. J. M. Tobin. London ; New York: Penguin Books, 1991. ISBN: 978-0-14-042348-8.
- Killeen, Kevin, and Peter J. Forshaw, eds. *The Word and the World: Biblical Exegesis and Early Modern Science*. Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-230-50707-4.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. 1st Touchstone Edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. ISBN: 978-0-684-82384-3.
- Linden, Stanton J., ed. *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*. New York: Cambridge University Press, September 15, 2003. ISBN: 978-0-521-79662-0.
- MacCulloch, Diarmaid. *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. Kindle Edition. Penguin Books, February 25, 2010.
- Martin, Sean. *Alchemy & Alchemists*. Google-Books-ID: x9aQCwAAQBAJ. Oldcastle Books, November 24, 2006. ISBN: 978-1-84243-538-0.
- More, Paul Elmer, and Frank Leslie Cross, eds. *Anglicanism*. Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-227-17290-2.

- Newman, William R. "Mercury and Sulphur among the High Medieval Alchemists: From Razi and Avicenna to Albertus Magnus and Pseudo-Roger Bacon." *Ambix* 61, no. 4 (October 27, 2014): 327–344. doi:10.1179/1745823414Y.0000000004. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/1745823414Y.0000000004>.
- "Order of Mass." Accessed January 24, 2018. http://universalis.com/static/mass/orderofmass.htm#eucharisticPrayer1_1.
- Orsi, Robert A. *History and Presence*. OCLC: 923255349. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-674-04789-1.
- Osler, Margaret J. *Reconfiguring the World: Nature, God, and Human Understanding from the Middle Ages to Early Modern Europe*. History of Science. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8018-9655-2.
- Pasnau, Robert. *Metaphysical themes, 1274-1689*. In collaboration with EBSCO Academic Complete eBook Collection. OCLC: 828424150. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-19-150179-1.
- Rubin, Miri. *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. ISBN: 978-0-521-35605-3.
- Snyder, Howard A. "Salvation Means Creation Healed: Creation, Cross, Kingdom and Mission." *The Asbury Journal* 62, no. 1 (2007): 3.
- Szulakowska, Urszula. *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom: Alchemy and Apocalyptic Discourse in the Protestant Reformation*. In collaboration with Proquest ebrary Academic Complete eBook Collection. Aries Book Series, vol. 1. OCLC: 319492616. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006. ISBN: 978-1-4356-5759-5.
- Torrell, Jean Pierre. *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*. In collaboration with EBSCO Academic Complete eBook Collection and Proquest Ebook Central Academic Complete Collection. Translated by Bernhard Blankenhorn O.P. Thomistic Ressourcement Series, Volume 2. OCLC: 876043651. Washington, District of Columbia: Catholic University of America Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8132-1938-7.
- . *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 2: Spiritual Master*. The Catholic University of America Press, April 11, 2003. ISBN: 978-0-8132-1316-3.
- U. S. Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: USCCB Publishing, April 15, 1995. ISBN: 978-0-385-47967-7.



NON-EXCLUSIVE THESIS DISTRIBUTION LICENSE

By signing and submitting this license you, "the author", grant to Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) the non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute your submission in electronic format via the World Wide Web, as well as the right to migrate or convert your submission, without alteration of the content, to any medium or format for the purpose of preservation and/or continued distribution.

VTS acknowledges that this is a non-exclusive license; any copyrights in the submission remain with the author or other copyright holder and subsequent uses of the submitted material by that person(s) are not restricted by this license.

The author agrees that VTS may keep more than one copy of this submission for purposes of security, backup and preservation.

The author represents that the submission covered by this license is his/her original work and that he/she has the right to grant this license to VTS. The author further represents that the submission does not, to the best of his/her knowledge, infringe upon any third-party's copyright. If the submission contains material for which the author does not hold copyright, the author represents that he/she has obtained the unrestricted permission of the copyright holder to grant this license to VTS, and that such third-party material is clearly identified and acknowledged within the text or content of the submission. In the event of a subsequent dispute over the copyrights to material contained in this submission, the author agrees to indemnify and hold harmless VTS and its employees or agents for any uses of the material authorized by this license.

If this submission is based upon work that has been sponsored or supported by any agency or organization other than VTS, the author represents that he/she has fulfilled any right of review or other obligation required by contract or agreement with the supporting entity.

The author specifically acknowledges that the content may constitute an educational record under FERPA (20 U.S.C. § 1232g) and expressly consents to the use of the content as contemplated under this agreement.

VTS will make the submission available to the public using (check one):

a Creative Commons Attribution / Non-commercial / No derivative works license accompanied by a copyright statement indicating the author's continuing rights

U.S. Copyright statement indicating the author's continuing rights only.

VTS will take all reasonable steps to ensure that the author's name remains clearly associated with the submission and that no alterations of the content are made.

Author Information:

Name: Nicholas Evancho

Signature: [Redacted] Date: 4/26/18

Address: [Redacted]

City: [Redacted]

Phone: [Redacted]

Email: [Redacted]

Attachment A
Identification of Content

Title of Content: The Alchemical Eucharist
Author(s): Nicholas Evancho
Date Content was Created: 4/26/18
Description of Content: Master's Thesis

For more information contact:

Mitzi Budde
Head Librarian
Bishop Payne Library
Virginia Theological
Seminary
Alexandria VA 22304
703-461-1733
paynlib@vts.edu