CLOSE READING: EYE AND EAR
Enough said, then, about Hopkins’s partiality to Scotus’s haecceitas, about inscape and instress and sake. Technical metaphysics and personal idiom do not a poet make. Terminology winds up after the fact what should have proved true in the doing; it does lend the color of intellectual legitimacy to what has been done, but if the deed has not made it on its own, no amount of terminological legitimation will avail. Only if it appears that Hopkins felt and thought and responded and expressed himself in terms of the particular will his professed partiality to Scotus’s concept be more than an interesting detail for academics to discuss.

The particular is never popular. It is more comfortable—and certainly more respectable—to be hand in glove with the prevailing ideology and the going concern, just as it would have been more comfortable for Hopkins to have named the Church, with the first Vatican Council, the “sign raised among the nations” than to have likened her to a cow ambling around the pasture-ground. Had Hopkins been less partial to the particular, Bridges would not have felt he had to apologize for his obscure friend’s “efforts to force emotion into theological or sectarian channels” and for “the naked encounter of sensualism and asceticism” of The Golden Echo. Just fancy: faith (not religious sentiment) in poetry!—how narrow-minded can you be? No, better to rhapsodize, explicitly or implicitly, on the Spirit of the Age, and thus experience yourself, poet that you are, as the privileged, oh-so sensitive instrument that is in tune with what’s in the air. In that way you have all the benefits of being both able to boast your own “original” talent and capable of feeling concerned with the totality of life. It will get you to the high altar of the culture, whence you can pontificate; it
will make you Poet Laureate. Never will you have to pay attention to precious detail and feel its attractiveness and intractability in that “naked encounter”; never will you be forced to be so irrational as to profess partiality to something whose relevance cannot be demonstrated by cogent proof or general consensus; no, just paint the large canvas with Tennyson and Swinburne, mind the general weal with moral tone and coaxing phrase, and let the van Goghs and the Gauguins pay attention to old shoes, rush-seated chairs, and oddities in the Pacific. Be lofty, not precise. Edify or shock, but don’t encounter. Better for your reputation, to say nothing of your nerves. So be sweet, be reasonable, if necessary emphatically so; mind the general. Or be “against,” be unreasonable; mind the general by defying the established order, by becoming the prophet of the fin de siècle. Eschew the particular (except if you can fit it into a general frame of things), be impartial, never be “sectarian.” Don’t cultivate “things counter, original, spare, strange; whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)” Otherwise you may find yourself eventually put away in Dublin, obscurely correcting undergraduate compositions, and having to admit demurely: “Now it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive, and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I cannot have escaped.”

Well, better be an honest neurotic buried in Dublin with no prospect of having your poetry published than aim for the cheap recognition that comes from putting the cognoscenti to sleep—Hopkins saw that twenty-three years before he died at age forty-five, and wrote it down with the deadly precision of a Martial:

Our swans are now of such remorseless quill,  
Themselves live singing and their hearers kill.1

For what if the particular—including the “sectarian”—is precisely the source of your awareness? If you find yourself moved, not by the general, but by the irrationally individual? If you find the broad sweep cheap? If totality and infinity happen to be, not your first order of business, but your last perspective? If you are the kind of person Martin Buber was to paint: suspicious of the autonomous construction of reality in the name of philosophy, imagination, creed, or psychology, and firmly basing yourself on encounter—doing justice
to the particular? If you find that reliable and durable speaking-about (“I-It”) is only won the hard way, by speaking-to and being spoken to (“I-Thou”)?

That may leave you forever “a lonely began,” praying for patience, casting for comfort; “my taste was me.” No soothing generalities for an anodyne. The heart, “hard at bay,” vulnerable, “not outward-steeled,” open to the touch of whatever strikes it, and compelled to speak, “never ask if meaning it, wanting it, warned of it.”

Heart of a Poem

Ah, touched in your bower of bone
Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,
Have you! make words break from me here all alone,
Do you!—mother of being in me, heart.
O unteachably after evil, but uttering truth,
Why, tears! is it? tears; such a melting, a madrigal start!
Never-eldering revel and river of youth,
What can it be, this glee? the good you have there of your own?

This is stanza 18—the middle stanza of a series of thirty-five that make up Hopkins’s The Wreck of the Deutschland.

Six stanzas lead up to it (12-17), telling the story, from the sad but peaceable sailing on Saturday to the outcry of the nun in the midst of disaster. It is followed by (again) six stanzas “reading” the story to the core (19-24); its name becomes: Christ Crucified. The whole complex is held together, by the figure of style known as inclusio, by stanzas 11 and 25. The former is an evocation of a dance macabre on a theme of Isaiah, with “Life is Death” for a message (Is 40, 6). The latter conjures up the Spirit of God hovering over the primal tohuvabohu and Jesus in the midst of the storm surrounded by frantic disciples—“the God who makes the dead live and summons things that are not as if they were”—with “Death is Life” for a message (Rom 4, 17).

Preceding stanza 11 and following stanza 25 are again two sets of six stanzas each (5-10 and 26-31), affording another striking parallelism. In stanzas 5 and 26, Nature is recognized as a way to God, but with a proviso; “his mystery must be instressed, stressed” and “what by your measure is the heaven of desire”? 
Stanzas 6 and 27 lead one step closer to the meeting-place with God, who encounters humanity not out of the blue, but in time. Whatever guilt-hushing, heart-flushing terror the powers of the universe may administer, the real locus of the heart’s surrender is not universal but particular and dateable: “it rides time,” “the jading and jar of the cart, time’s tasking.”

But the culmination-point is reached in stanzas 7-8 and 28-29: the suffering Christ draws all human hearts for himself in an ultimate decision: Ipse, he is the name and the shape of present and past, heaven and earth. There is no obvious parallelism between stanzas 9-10 and 30-31, although the theme of God’s ways with Man, leading to God’s merciful mastery (9-10) rhymes with the “heart-throe, birth of a brain, Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright,” and with the call issued to the “poor sheep” in the disaster through the nun’s outcry (30-31). The encompassing theme of the two sets of stanzas (5-10 and 26-31) may thus be roughly characterized as “the particular encounter of God with Man.”

Finally, there are the introduction and the coda of this poem, which so strikingly resembles the build-up of, say, César Franck’s D-minor Symphony, or Tchaikovsky’s Serenade for Strings, whose codas also return to the opening motifs, only enriched and confirmed by the experience of what has happened in the course of the work. Both sets of four stanzas (1-4 and 32-35) deal with God’s mastery experienced as a call to total surrender in and through and beyond the threat of disintegration and even death.

Put schematically, then, the course of The Wreck of the Deutschland runs as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
1-4 & \quad 5-10 & \quad 11 & \quad 12-17 & \quad 18 & \quad 19-24 & \quad 25 & \quad 26-31 & \quad 32-35 \\
4 & + 6 & + 1 & + 6 & + 1 & + 6 & + 1 & + 6 & + 4
\end{align*}
\]

But the point is this: the entire ricercare is constructed around stanza 18: the experience of the heart that will not be domesticated. The heart, not to be reduced to system or ideology or principle or law. The heart, vulnerable and undefended. The heart that does not even try to beat the system. Individuum est ineffabile. The heart which yearns (irrationally, says the head; Id, says Freud) for the really-real in the oh-so-particular Other (arbitrary, says the head that has its norms and
Yes, the tools of generalization are safe only in the hands of those who relish the particular. The hand’s grasp kills by sheer comprehension unless it is sensitive enough to grope and touch, and prepared, in the last resort, to be pierced. Comprehensive concepts become tyrant killers unless they remember that originally they were conceptions born out of intercourse with the particular. The generally valid and the even number tend to repress the realization that they go back to partiality and the odd number, don’t they?

But only the undefended heart knows this:

Áh, what the heart is! which, like carriers let fly —
Doff darkness, homing nature knows the rest —
To its own fine function, wild and self-instressed,
Falls as light as lifelong schooled to what and why.
("The Handsome Heart")

The appeal of the particular is unjustifiable before any tribunal. No system of thought, taste, orthodoxy, culture, or law will be able to account for that most fugitive, most human fact of all; the encounter with the Other out of which I gain identity and truth, not as property, but as gift. Cor ad cor loquitur. Indefensible? Yes, of course, as indefensible as Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky’s The Idiot. Yet this kind of defenselessness tends to show up the weakness of the systems and the powers that be. In comparison with Hopkins, who remembers Bridges?

One way of measuring Hopkins’s reliance on the heart’s response to the particular is to point to the enormous intellectual demands he makes on the language, and, through the language, on his readership. It is as if he trusts that people, once they have allowed themselves to be touched down to the bottom of their individuality, will be capable of great intellectual presence of mind in the face of the most diverse and varied allusions, associations, visions and ideas crammed into the language—in other words, that they will be capable of a really comprehensive world-view with plenty of room for everything and everybody. Since the human-potential movement and the writings of people like Carl Gustav Jung, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Dr. Laing this trust on Hopkins’s part may have become more credible to us. Not adaptability (nor its rebellious counterpart) but personal depth now appears to us to be the safeguard and the source of intellectual integrity.
Really “doing your own thing,” really “letting it be” is a far more reliable road to a coherent world-picture, including a commanding creed, than buying into the system. Here again Hopkins warns: “take breath and read it with the ears, as I always wish to be read, and my verse becomes all right.” Not the dissociative, cognitive, distantial, objectifying approach to Hopkins’s poetry—which is: reading it with the eyes—but the associative, affective, interpersonal, “presential” approach—which is: trusting your ears (*Cor ad cor loquitur!*)—will give a person access to the ability to hold Hopkins’s thought together. Again, the general is anchored in the actuality of the particular.

In *The Wreck of the Deutschland* all that is comprehensive and all-encompassing, all that is total and infinite at the level of content, too, is unflinchingly anchored in the particular, without the slightest attempt on Hopkins’s part to justify, apologize, explain, or make palatable. Modern-day jargon would call this: critique of ideology. Except that in Hopkins we find, no elaborate critique of the repressive conventions, tastes, and agendas set by the religious and secular sensibilities he finds himself a part of, but simply the practical and unapologetic (if, understandably, somewhat self-conscious) start of a process that has time and again put dominant moods and metaphors and systems in their places: he delivers himself up to his perceptions of, and responses to, the particular, and allows himself to be shaped by them. The Impressionists had done something analogous a few years earlier, when their way of showing what things really looked like had put the so-called realisms of the previous century to shame. And in a world dominated by idealism Brentano and Husserl were trying to go “back to the things”—a rather unpopular move for the time being.

Hopkins is as much part of the late nineteenth-century Roman Catholic Church in England—though probably with some sound Tractarian reluctance—as he is part of the late Victorian literary world. Yet at the core he fits neither, because he undercuts, by personal depth of perception and responsiveness, the ideologies and systems and tastes any culture tends to inculcate.

At three points in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* this anchorage of the far-flung picture of God’s all-encompassing mastery and mercy is most obvious.

First, there is the unashamedly autobiographical start of the poem, crammed with the paradoxes that Rudolf Otto was to sum up under
the general rubrics of *tremendum* and *fascinans*, paradoxes that are resolved by an account of the particular heart’s decision to go to the person of Christ:

> I whirled out wings that spell  
> And fled with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host.  
> My heart, but you were dove-winged, I can tell.  
> Carrier-witted, I am bold to boast,  
> To flash from the flame to the flame then, tower from the grace to the grace.  
> (st. 3)

Second, there is the theological fulcrum of the poem in stanzas 6-8. The sense of God’s presence, though available in “the world’s splendor and wonder,” stems, not from the experienced harmony of the world, but from surrender to a particular moment in time. *Le dieu des philosophes* is—for all his speculative attractiveness—not the living God, but a rationalization, which does not in the least mean that those who find the living God are cocksure in their surrender to the scandal of particularity:

> But it rides time like riding a river  
> (And here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss).  
> (st. 6)

And once again we are faced with the picture of the particular heart’s surrender to “the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4, 6):

What none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard at bay,

> Is out with it! Oh,  
> We lash with the best or worst  
> Word last!  
> (st. 7-8)

Eventually the large canvas does appear:

> Make mercy in all of us, out of us all  
> Mastery, but be adored, but be adored King.  
> (st. 10)
But that large canvas comes forth out of the recognition of this very particular event: Jesus of Nazareth.

Third, there is the sweep of stanzas 12-17. The narrative of the ship’s departure and sailing and wreck, and of the misadventures and despair of its crew and passengers is narrowed down, finally, to the one figure that becomes the key to the far-flung interpretation of the entire event’s significance:

Till a lioness arose breasting the babble,
A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told.
(st. 17)

It is precisely at this point that the heart’s response—the crucial stanza 18—is placed. Significantly, the imagery, both of the nun’s outcry and of the heart’s response, is consistently oral/acoustical: faith comes from hearing, and hearing is fiducial and interpersonal and “presential,” whereas sight is objectifying and distantial.

Once the whole scene has been read and interpreted in terms of an ineffable (the *aposiopese* of stanza 28) encounter with Christ, the far-reaching significance of the event can be stated in stanzas 32-35. The “comfortless unconfessed of them” function as the transition to the far-flung question of the end of stanza 31: “is the shipwrack then a harvest, does tempest carry the grain for thee?”

And Hopkins, going back to his own experience of the outset of the poem, sums up:

I admire thee, master of the tides,
Of the Yore-flood, of the year’s fall;
The recurb and the recovery of the gulf’s sides,
The girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall;
Stanching, quenching ocean of a motionable mind;
Ground of being, and granite of it: pást áll
Grásp Gód, throned behind
Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides;

With a mercy that outrides
The all of water, an ark
For the listener; for the lingerer with a love glides
Lower than death and the dark;
A vein for the visiting of the past-prayer, pent in prison,
The last-breath penitent spirits—the uttermost mark
Our passion-plungèd giant risen,
The Christ of the Father compassionate, fetched in his storm
of his strides. (st. 32-33)

The Particular Christ

There is a strict analogy between Hopkins’s responsiveness to the particular and the critique of late-Victorian poetical sensibility implied in this on the one hand, and, on the other hand, his personal surrender to the person of Christ, which is the essence of Christianity—the search of which was such a neuralgic concern of the era he lived in, witness the series of books on Das Wesen des Christentums published in the nineteenth century. For Hopkins, the encounter with the particular is both the source and the abiding norm of any generalization, including the Church’s Creed and the Spirit of the Age.

In August 1935, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (whose theology was to be discovered posthumously as much as Hopkins’s poetry) was addressing a fraternity of assistant pastors of the Confessional Church of the Province of Saxony about the question: How can biblical texts be “represented,” how can they come to life in the present, how can they be made relevant and of actual importance now? His answer: not by tailoring them to the dominant mood. Never must the scandal of particularity be subdued in favor of a facile consonance with the prevailing culture. Bonhoeffer said:

The question became acute in this form for the first time in the era of the emancipation of autonomous Reason, i.e., in Rationalism, and it has determined theology till now, up to and including German-Christian theology. Rationalism was nothing but the long-dormant human demand for an autonomous construction of life on the basis of the forces in the world as given, and to that extent the matter in hand is indeed a question that is contained in man’s very demand for autonomy; that implies: autonomous man, if he wants to acknowledge to be a Christian, too, demands that the
Christian message should justify itself before the tribunal of his autonomy. Should the justification come off, then he will call himself a Christian; if it fails to come off, then he will call himself a pagan. It makes no difference that the tribunal before which the Christian message has to justify itself is called Reason in the eighteenth century or Culture in the nineteenth century or Volkstum in the twentieth century (or the year 1933, with all its implications). The question is exactly the same: Is Christianity justifiable before us the way we are—thank God? All those who want to lay claim to being called Christians for whatever reasons—whether rational, cultural, or political—have exactly the same urgent need, viz., to justify Christianity before the tribunal of the present. The assumption is exactly the same, viz., that the Archimedean point, the solid, unquestionable point of departure has already been established (whether in Reason, in Culture, or in Volkstum), and that the movable, questionable, fluid element is precisely the Christian message. The method is exactly the same, viz., to engage in re-presentation in such a way as to run the Christian message through the sieve of one’s own knowledge—what does not go through is despised and thrown out; so to trim down and lop off the message as to make it fit the fixed framework; until the eagle can no longer raise itself and soar up into his true element, but becomes, his pinions clipped, one particular show-piece among the other tame, domesticated animals. Just as the farmer who needs a horse for his land leaves the fiery stallion in the market-place and buys himself a tame, spunkless workhorse, so domestication has produced a serviceable Christianity; and then it stands to reason that people will lose interest in this entire construction pretty soon and turn away from it. This type of re-presentation leads straight into paganism.²

There is, then, a deep affinity between Hopkins’s fundamental option as a poet and his fundamental stance as a Christian: not serviceability to the dominant concerns, but truthfulness to the encounter is the norm, both for the poet and for the believer in him. It is ironical that this man, so very particular both as a poet and as a Christian, was summoned before the tribunal of ecclesiastical and cultural taste so
often, and treated so condescendingly by both: he was not an ideologue speaking from a covert or overt creed (his critics were!), but first and foremost one touched by the particular, to which he responded from the oh-so particular (and indeed somewhat fastidious) heart, not from the generalizing head. Did Hopkins realize that he could do justice to the particular, because in this man Jesus the particular had been taken up, converted, and turned into the bearer of an absolute perspective, one in whose light (fugitive though it may be, “as skies betweenpie mountains”) dominant moods appear far less powerful, and indeed downright transitory?

O then, weary then why should we tread? O why are we so haggard at the heart, so care-coiled, care-killed, so fagged, so fashed, so cogged, so cumbered,
When the thing we freely forfeit is kept with fonder a care,
Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept
Far with fonder a care (and we, we should have lost it) finer, fonder
A care kept.

(“The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo”)

If the particular is so absolutely kept, it is indeed worth doing justice to, never mind the Spirit of the Age. And well, should the alleging of haecceitas lend this attention to detail some intellectual respectability into the bargain, then more power to Scotus.

Notes

Published in The Month (Second New Series) 8 (1975): 340-45. This is the issue commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Hopkins’s return to poetry in 1875 and an act of posthumous reparation for the rejection of The Wreck of the Deutschland by the then editor of The Month. Lightly revised for the present collection.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Vergegenwärtigung neutestamentlicher Texte,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1966), III, 303-24; cited at 303-05. Volksstum was Nazi shorthand for *gesundes Volksempfinden* (“the people’s healthy sensibility”) to promote political conformism on the basis of racial identity. The meaning of the word is close to what certain U.S. politicians have at certain times called “the silent majority,” with the same undemocratic agenda in mind.
A Note on Ther in Curses and Blessings in Chaucer

for Pat, with respect and love

The purpose of this note is to make a statement on the use and the meaning of the word ther (“there”) in thirteen passages in the Chaucerian corpus. In these passages, it will be argued, ther functions, syntactically speaking, as the introductory adverb of a main clause involving a curse or blessing. Specifically, what will be denied is that it functions as a relative adverb, which would reduce the clause to a subclause. It will also be argued, semantically speaking, that this use of ther, while almost purely expletive, introduces connotations of what will be called “indeterminacy with theological or religious connotations.” The treatment offered here has no textual claims to make; hence, the use of Robinson’s text merely reflects the author’s personal preference. At the same time, in the interest of making the point clearly, Robinson’s punctuation will be modified in places; the appropriateness of the changes will be argued in the course of this note.

This note uses seven editions. The earliest is Robert Kilburn Root’s edition of Troilus and Criseyde of 1926 and Walter W. Skeat’s 1933 one-volume Oxford University Press edition of the entire corpus; the most recent is Fisher’s 1977 edition of the same corpus. No statement is implied in this selection other than the claim that this represents a fair sampling of editorial comment on the problem in hand.1 The bracketed transpositions into modern English are Nevill Coghill’s.2 The following passages to be discussed are numbered for easy reference. Uses of ther are highlighted by italics.

(1) Troilus and Criseyde, ii, 586-588:
Ther were nevere two so wel ymet,
Whan ye ben his al hool, as he is youre.
Ther myghty God yet graunte us see that houre!
[Never were two so fortunately met
As you, when you are fully his, will be;
Almighty God! May I be there to see!]

(2) *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 946-947:
That is wel seyd,” quod he, “my nece deere.
*Ther* Good Thrift on that wise gentil herte!

[Pandar replied: “That is well said, my dear,
A blessing on your wise and gentle heart!”

(3) *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 964-966:
And with that word he for a quysshen ran,
And seyde, “Kneleth now, while that you leste!
*There* God youre hertes brynge soon at reste!”

[He ran and fetched a cushion from the chest
“Now kneel away as long as you may please,
And may the Lord soon set your hearts at ease.”]

(4) *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 1013-15:
Alas, that he, al hool, or of hym slyvere,
Shuld han his refut in so digne a place!
*Ther* Jove hym soone out of your herte arace!

[Alas that it — or even a small slice
Of it — should refuge in so fair a place!
May Jove uproot it, may it leave no trace!]

(5) *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 1436-40:
Thow doost, alIas, to shortly thyn office,
Thow rakle nyght! *Ther* God, maker of kynde,
The, for thyn haste and thyn unkynde vice,
So faste ay to oure hemysperie bynde,
That nevere more under the ground thow wynde!”

[Alas, too briefly is thy business done,
Swift night! May God, the Lord of Nature, hear,
And for the malice of they downward run,
Curse thee, and bind thee to our hemisphere,
Never beneath the earth to reappear!]

(6) *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 1455-56:
What hastow lost, why sekestow this place?
*Ther* God thi light so quenche, for his grace!

[What hast thou lost? What doest thou seek of us?
God quench the light in thee for doing thus!]

(7) *Troilus and Criseyde*, III, 1524-26:
And with swiche voys as though his herte bledde,
He seyde, “Farewel, dere herte swete!
*Ther* God us graunte sownde and soone to mete!”

[And with the voice of one whose spirit bled
He said “Farewell, my dearest heart, my sweet,
And may God grant us safe and soon to meet.”]

(8) *Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 1525-26:
“Awey” quod he; “*ther* Joves yeve the sorwe!
Thow shalt be fals, peraunter, yet tomorwe!”

[Off with you! God’s sorrow
Light upon you! I’ll prove you false tomorrow!]

(9) *Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 1786-88:
Go, litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye!
*Ther* God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
So sende myght to make in some comedye!

[Go little book, go little tragedy,
Where God may send thy maker, ere he die,
The power to make a work of comedy.]

(10) *The Canterbury Tales*, I(A) 2815-16 (*The Knight’s Tale*)
Arcite is coold, *ther* Mars his soule gye!
Now wol I spoken forth of Emelye.
[Arcite is cold. Mars guide him on his way! Something of Emily I have to say.]

(11) *The Canterbury Tales*, II(B) 598-602 (*The Man of Law’s Tale*)
This knyght, thurgh Sathanas temptaciouns,  
Al softely is to the bed ygo,  
And kitte the throte of Hermengyld atwo,  
And leyde the blody knyf by dame Custance,  
And wente his wey; ther God yeve hym meschance!

[Little did she note  
How he, o’ermastered by the Fiend’s temptation,  
Had softly come upon her; then he smote  
The Lady Hermengild and slit her throat,  
Then laying the bloody knife beside the bed  
Of Constance went his way. God strike him dead!]

(11) *The Canterbury Tales*, III(D) 1561-62 (*The Friar’s Tale*)
“Heyt now,” quod he, “ther Ihesu Crist yow blesse,  
And al his handwerk, bothe moore and lesse!”

[“Hup, there!” he shouted, “Jesus bless you, love,  
And all His handiwork!”]

(13) *The Canterbury Tales*, IV(E) 1307-08 (*The Merchant’s Tale*)
This sentence, and an hundred thynges worse,  
Writeth this man; ther God his bones corse!

[Opinions such as these and hundreds worse  
This fellow wrote, God lay him under curse!]

**Editorial Comments**

The editorial comments on these texts cover a broad range. In terms of sheer frequency, Donaldson comments on the largest number of passages (all except 2, 6 and 8), whereas Skeat, in the Glossarial Index of his edition, interprets only three (1, 5 and 12). Pratt covers all four passages from *The Canterbury Tales* (10, 11, 12 and 13). Passages
10 and 12 have elicited the most numerous comments, with number 10 receiving attention from Robinson, Baugh, Pratt, Donaldson and Fisher, and number 12 from Skeat, Robinson, Baugh, Pratt and Donaldson. Passage 8 is the least commented upon: in fact, none of the editors surveyed explain it. The range of comments is wide, too. Some editors confine themselves to a simple explanation of the meaning, whereas others comment on the syntax of the turn of phrase, and some even volunteer hints at semantic development and derivation to explain its meaning. Our treatment of these editorial comments will follow this order.

Meaning

Pratt simply notes that *ther* in passages 10, 11, and 12 means “may,” and that *ther God* in 13 means “may God.” Donaldson, too, simply notes that *ther* in the passages he comments on means “may”; there is no reason to assume he would have made any different comments on passages 2, 6 and 8, had he chosen to do so. In his “Glossarial Index.” Skeat provides us with three different meanings. In passage 1, *ther* means “as to which”; in passage 5, it means “wherefore”; these two interpretations have this in common that Skeat reads the clauses as dependent relative clauses in the optative subjunctive. The third passage explained by Skeat admits of no such interpretation; this, it seems, is what prompts him to supply the main clause by interpreting *ther* in passage 12 as “wherefore (I pray that).” Fisher, in the passages annotated by him, shows two distinct interpretations. In passages 5 and 6, he comments, *ther* means “may”; the same interpretation, slightly expanded, is given for passages 2 (“may prosperity be”) and 9 (“may God”). But in passages 4, 10 and 11 Fisher sees quasi-local adverbs. In the case of passage 4, this results in a syntactic connection between Criseyde’s prayer that Jove may remove the viper of jealousy from Troilus’s heart and her complaint at the viper’s having taken shelter there in the first place; but this construction is stylistically cumbersome on account of the presence, in the same sub-clause, of the relative adverb as well as the adverbial adjunct (“where . . . out of your heart”). Fisher’s reading of passage 10 is curious, too: if *ther* indeed means “wherever,” the modern English rendering would run: “Arcite is cold, wherever Mars may lead his soul.” Not very satisfactory. Fisher’s interpretation of passage 11 suffers from a similar lack of naturalness;
if *ther* does indeed mean “where (i.e., may),” the rendering would be: “And he went his way, where God may give him ill fortune.” If the curse were effective, where else could God give the evil young knight the bad fortune he deserved for his heinous deed? Such a truism hardly fits Chaucer’s ability as a story-teller. If we survey the thirteen passages at this point it would seem that both the force of analogy and the awkwardness of the interpretations of Fisher and, to some extent, Skeat already point in the direction of our contention that all the passages under consideration are best construed as main clauses expressing a religious wish.

**Syntax**

The syntax of these optative main clauses is well described by Root. He comments on the structure of the expression in his note on passage 5, which also refers to 2, 3, and 6, and simply points out that *ther* is used “to introduce a prayer or curse.”

Robinson’s comments are found in three main places. His glossary mentions “the idiomatic use [of *ther*] with optative clauses of blessing and cursing,” and refers the reader to his note on passage 10. A very similar note is found in his commentary on passage 2, with references to passages 3, 5 and 6. Notes on passages 9 and 12 give no new information; they simply refer the reader, once again, to the note on passage 10, which reinforces the impression that the latter note is meant to be understood as the place where Robinson will furnish the reader with his considered opinion. Robinson’s note on 10 is a curious blend. It seems to interpret *ther* both as a relative adverb and as an introductory expletive. Could it be that Robinson’s interpretation marks the half-way house between Skeat and the later commentators? The note runs:

2815 ther Mars hissoule gye, “where (or there) may Mars guide his soul.” For the use of *ther* as an expletive in optative clauses of blessing or cursing cf. *FrT*, III, 1561; *MerchT*, IV, 1308; *Tr* iii, 947, 966, 1437, 1456; v, 1787. The primary sense seems to have been “in that (or which) case,” “under which circumstances”; hence, “therewith,” “wherewith,” and perhaps “wherefore.”
Robinson’s note is ambiguous on two scores. Firstly, it is not clear whether Robinson means to contrast the use of ther in 10 to its use in passages 2, 3, 5, 6, (9), 12 and 13, or to draw a parallel. The only resource left to decide this is punctuation. As in passage 10, ther in passages 3, 5, 6, 9, and 13 is preceded by a comma, thus creating the impression that we are dealing with a dependent clause—an impression reinforced by the reference, in the note, to the relative “primary sense” of ther. But in passage 2, ther is preceded by a period. Passage 12 leaves no real option for variety in punctuation to bring out the syntax.

Secondly, it is not clear whether Robinson is speaking diachronically or synchronically. Is ther, as Chaucer uses it, an expletive (hence, a word with neither denotative nor connotative meaning), or does it carry at least a vestigial meaning held over from its “primary sense”? The total picture of Robinson’s note is one of irresolution.

Baugh offers us a variety of syntactical comments to interpret ther in passages 1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, and 13. In passage 1 (and, by summary reference, also in 2), ther is called “an exclamatory intensive introducing a wish or imprecation.” In passage 5, it is explained as “introducing a curse.” In passage 10, Baugh states, “the expletive use introducing a wish,” while in 11, he calls it an “intensive.” Ther in 12 is explained as a “hortatory adverb” and in 13 as “hortatory ther.” Baugh’s comments, however, for all their variety, have this in common that they appear to opt firmly for the main-clause interpretation of the idiom, and for the interpretation of ther as an introductory syntactic device.

This is confirmed by §73 of his introductory treatment, titled “The Language of Chaucer,” to which Baugh refers in most of his notes on the texts. In this paragraph, ther gets company:

73. Hortatory as (also), the, so. An imperative or hortatory subjunctive of wish, imprecation. etc., is commonly introduced by as, ther, or so.

Among the examples cited, our passage 13 illustrates the use of ther.

The problem with Baugh’s comments is, again, twofold. Firstly, in passages 6 and 9, neither of which elicits Baugh’s comments, ther and so are found in the same sentence, which suggests that there are differences, too. Baugh, together with all the other editors surveyed in this note except Root, does not stress a feature of ther noticed by himself in
passages 1, 3 and 10, and in his own §73, viz., that it introduces a wish, whether of cursing or blessing. Incidentally, none of the editors point out that in every instance, ther is also immediately followed by the name of a deity—good thrift in 2 is something very closely akin to Fortuna!—which is the true subject of the sentence. Hence, among the adverbs listed by Baugh in §73, ther is not completely parallel to as and so: it must be considered in its own right.

The second problem is that “hortatory” is not the same as “exclamatory,” or, for that matter, as “intensive” or “expletive.” Moreover, there are differences between “hortatory” and “imperative” words and expressions, which in their turn are different from a “wish or imprecation.” Imperatives have this in common with hortatories that the person, or persons, addressed are also urged to be the subject of the action commanded or commended. In the case of imperatives, the addressee never includes the speaker; in the case of hortatories, the subject of the action commended often includes the speaker. Wishes and imprecations, however, express, in what is usually called an “optative,” a desire on the speaker’s part that some third party—in our passages, a deity—should accomplish something in relation to the person(s) addressed and/or to some other party or parties connected with the person(s) addressed. From Baugh’s examples in §73 it would appear that as and so can indeed function in hortatory, imperative and optative clauses (our passages 6 and 9 suggest that they are not always introductory), whereas our evidence suggests that ther has a much more limited use, viz., that of an introductory linguistic device of the syntactic kind, immediately followed by the name of a deity, in optative main clauses of cursing and blessing.

This finding prompts us to propose a change in punctuation. Hussey has rightly pointed out that “modern punctuation . . . is inevitably a form of interpretation.”\(^4\) Modern punctuation practices, by contrast with, say, seventeenth-century ones, tend to bring out syntax rather than diction; we tend to be analytic and visual in our approach to print rather than synthetic and oral-acoustical. In accord with this, I have changed Robinson’s colon in passage 1 into a period, his commas in passages 3, 4, 7 and 9 into exclamation marks; his comma in 6 has become a question mark, and his commas in passages 8, 10, 11 and 13 have been replaced by semicolons. Passage 2 did not require a change; passage 5, which now shows an exclamation mark after nyght (following Tatlock and Kennedy), could also have been repunctuated by putting
an exclamation mark at the end of the line preceding the line in which ther occurs. Passage 12 does not offer much opportunity for variation; I have omitted Robinson’s exclamation mark after Heyt, if only to show that there are other factors besides syntax that determine punctuation, taste being perhaps the most important.

Semantic Development and Derivation and Meaning

Skeat and most probably Robinson detect a relative function in ther; Robinson suggests that, at any rate, its “primary sense” may be (or have been) relative. The first point to be made here is that etymological, diachronic approaches to present meaning are notoriously unreliable. It is, of course, true that ther, in Chaucer, can be relative as well as demonstrative, but it seems unnecessary and far-fetched to suggest that its function in the passages under discussion is detectably relative in synchronic terms. This observation is strengthened by the fact that, even if we were to allow that passages 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 could conceivably be construed as relative subclauses (though only at the cost of great strain on the meaning of the text), passages 2, 8, 12, and 13 do not permit this construal at all, since ther, in those passages, does not have any possible antecedent, and hence can only be construed as the introductory move to an optative main clause.

If, therefore, we take our cue from analogy and notice the identical syntactic of all our passages, we must say a firm goodbye to ther viewed as a relative adverb—that is to say, as a word with a clearly, or even dimly, denotative meaning. This is tantamount to saying that semantic development and derivation do not provide us with a clue to whatever meaning, if any, ther contributes to the passages under discussion.

Is it possible to go on to suggest any semantic function ther might have in synchronic terms? Both Robinson and Baugh use the term “expletive”; this suggests that no meaning, whether denotative or connotative, can be attributed to ther. Baugh, in addition, uses the terms “intensive” and “exclamatory,” thus restricting whatever meaning ther may have to enhancement of the other elements in the sentences or to the speaker’s affective stance.

Thus the question arises, Are we in a position to suggest any other contribution the word may have made to the meaning of our passages, in the ears and minds of Chaucer, his listeners and his readers? I think we are.
Impersonal “There”

“There” in modern English, like er and (archaic) daar in contemporary Dutch and da in modern German, frequently often introduces “impersonal” sentences—the most ordinary turn of phrase being: “there is/are/was/were/have been,” etc. + subject + (in English omissible) relative pronoun + verbal form: “There’s a man wants to see you.” To my knowledge, this usage has occurred in the languages mentioned throughout their known histories. The fact that, diachronically and etymologically speaking, “there” represents a “weakened” form of the demonstrative adverb of place is of no relevance to its real meaning in this kind of context. A closely analogous use of “there” is found in phrases like: “On a fine winter’s night, there arrived a stranger in the village.” When compared to its alternative, “On a fine winter’s day, a stranger arrived in the village,” it will be noticed that the former expression has a slight connotation of something impending, of an atmospheric, indeterminate quality surrounding the stranger’s arrival.

Many languages, including non-Indo-European ones like Hebrew, have linguistic devices to subdue the tone of determinacy inherent in the declarative sentence, and even in non-declarative sentences, if the subject of the sentence is God or a deity. Could it be that ther in the passages we have discussed is a linguistic device whose function it is to give the sentence a note of “indeterminacy”—i.e., a “numinous” connotation, in order to convey that neither God nor deities are agents in the same determinate way as mere mortals are, and to convey that, in regard to God or gods, all we can do is wish, not command, let alone control? If this should be the case, this would help seal the fate of the construal of ther as a relative adverb in the passages we have discussed.

A final note. Eleven of the thirteen passages were noticed by the author in the course of reading all of Chaucer’s works. A quick check of the Tatlock-Kennedy concordance, while confirming the incompleteness of the author’s findings beyond the shadow of a doubt, did turn up two more instances, viz. passages 8 and 11. Tatlock and Kennedy did not turn up contrary evidence—ther God hire bones blesse! I have not reread Chaucer to find more instances. The list of passages, therefore, is probably exhaustive, but not presented as such.
Notes


3. Note that Coghill dexterously transposes the passage by treating *ther* as if it were the relative adverbial expression “there, where.”


Rahner on Sprachregelung:  
Regulation of Language? Of Speech?

Introduction: Homage to Karl Rahner

The late Karl Rahner’s elder Jesuit brother Hugo, a fine scholar as well as a fine stylist, is said to have quipped at one time that he hoped to become famous in his old age by translating Karl’s work into German. Yet Karl’s works did win for their author, in 1973, the Sigmund Freud Prize for Scholarly Prose of the German Academy for Language and Literature, with the citation stating: “The master of the literary word has succeeded in winning a new hearing for the word of religion.” What a striking contrast between two appraisals!

The first, humorous remark calls to mind the high degree of abstraction, formalism, and technicality in Rahner’s theology, where terms have to be distinguished: existentiell is not identical with existential, and formell is not the same as formal, and the “transcendental” must be carefully told apart from the “categorical.” This aspect of Rahner’s works, if we apply Walter Ong’s analysis, is associated with the visual, the objectifying, the analytical, the logical—in short, with the kind of literacy that is associated with reading, with concentration on, and analysis of, words and terms, and further down the road, with scientific method, along with its panoply of terminological tools.

There is a second aspect to Rahner’s works—the one which the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung, in awarding him the prize, must mainly have had in mind. Rahner’s work has deep roots in the literary world, where the living word, the oral-acoustical, the interpersonal, the synthetic, and the rhetorical are predominant. In fact, the citation explicitly refers to this: Rahner has won a new hearing for the word of religion. After all, the German word Sprache in the name of the Academy that awarded the prize, conveys a concern not only with “language” and “usage,” but also with “speech”—not only with langue/langage, but also
with *parole*, in F. de Saussure’s classical distinction. Rahner has indeed greatly enriched the German language and the usage of theology viewed as the stable, available linguistic equipment scholarly theology needs; in this way, he has succeeded in making large new areas of cultural and religious experience habitually amenable to theological expression and discussion. But this success is rooted in a more fundamental achievement in the area of live speech: once touched by Rahner, the language of theology and thus, the German language itself have *sounded* differently. Many of Rahner’s formulas have rung a new note; a new excitement and a new eloquence have been brought to the international theological conversation.

This second, literary aspect of Rahner’s work is most prominent in some of his more “popular” writings in the areas of pastoral practice and spirituality, and in his many interviews, recently published—all of them models of liveliness and depth. Still, it is by no means absent from the “heavier” writings, which is consistent with the fact that a large portion of Rahner’s works, especially his essays in the many volumes of the *Theological Investigations*, were not *written* by him at all, but, of all things, dictated—second-order abstractions and periodic sentences and all. What we read, in other words, is very often live speech edited for the purposes of publication. Both Augustine preaching and Thomas Aquinas dictating come to mind, both with their scribes scribbling. Hans Urs von Balthasar, who has tended to claim the great aesthetic traditions of the Christian West as the principal source of his theology, once conceded in an interview that Rahner has been “the strongest theological power of our day”; but then proceeded to characterize the distinctive difference between himself and Rahner as follows:

> our points of departure were always different, really. There is a book by Simmel, titled *Kant und Goethe*. Rahner opted for Kant, or Fichte, if you wish—the transcendental starting-point. And like the Germanist I am, I opted for Goethe.²

Let the last sentence of this confession pass; the one before that, in its baldness, does Rahner, a lifelong reader of poetry, and his written work, with its strong undertow of literary and theological passion, a serious injustice. Much to the point, a younger friend colleague wrote:
Much of what Rahner wrote may be stiff reading. But that is no reason to deny he had the gift of literary language-use.3

Noticing the coexistence of these two, the periodic sentence and the accouterments of second-order abstraction, is a good way to approach the literary complexity of Rahner’s work. For all its high literacy, the periodic sentence hails from the world of rhetoric, with its cultivation of conviction, persuasion, and loyalty; it is a product of the tradition that has Cicero and Quintilian for its masters. The other ingredient, the abstractions, along with their daunting array of terminology, hail from the dispassionate world of methodical intellectual operations, aware—with a clarity that certainly goes back to the Aufklärung, but beyond that to scholasticism—of their uses, but also of their limitations. Walter Ong has explained that thought in a “preliterate,” that is to say, a rhetorical culture is bound up not with dispassionate observation, but with the dynamic world of interpersonal communication; once the world has been made “objective,” set off from the personal world as essentially neuter—in the best Kantian fashion—human thought is exercised no longer as a response to the world but as an operation upon it.4 One of the attractive features of Rahner’s work is precisely the harmonious, yet tensile, coexistence of two styles of thought, along with their corresponding linguistic styles. On the one hand, we have faith seeking to address Church and World, as well as trying to respond to them, both with a passion; on the other hand, we have the same faith dispassionately seeking for its own foundation, and probing Church and World to find the core of their integrity: the periodic sentence and the terminological tool.

“Sprachregelung”

No wonder that Rahner, so eloquent and at the same time so formal a thinker, came to take a strong interest in the status of theological language. More particularly, he came to take a strong interest in what he called Sprachregelung, “linguistic ruling”: the communal, i.e., ecclesial, fixation of doctrine in terminological form. The word first occurs in an essay entitled “What is a Dogmatic Statement?” first
published, in German, in 1961. Over the next ten years, Rahner returned regularly to the subject, as appears from the lists of citations in the *Schriften zur Theologie*, which give the original dates and occasions of the individual essays. It appears that Rahner saw the need for a treatment of the meaning of terminological doctrine mainly in three related areas of theological inquiry, namely, (1) the relationship between kerygma and dogma, (2) ecumenical relations, and (3) the obligations imposed by magisterial definitions.

Sensitivity to the tension between the (“kerygmatic”) language of faith and the formal language of dogma, as well as their relative autonomy, became a fundamental feature of Rahner’s thought. His main emphasis came to be on the fact that the latter is an intellectual specialization, and hence a limitation, of the former, and one dependent on historical circumstances.

In treating ecumenical matters, Rahner came to apply this specialization-concept. It allowed him to explore the implications of pluralism, and thus to show the significance of dialogue—dialogue among Catholics and with other Christians, but also with non-Christians. This dialogue, Rahner argued, was not only possible as a matter of principle, given the partiality of divergent dogmatic expressions. It was also a downright requisite for the deeper understanding of one’s own faith-commitment; ultimately, it would remind all participants of the basic function of all theological and religious language—the *reductio in mysterium*.

The authority of terminological dogma is not Rahner’s most fundamental theme, yet it appears to be the one he treats with the highest sense of urgency. It is never far to seek, not even when the first two areas are the principal subject of discussion. It was this issue which brought Rahner face to face with the issue of the unity of the Catholic Church in believing, and, in connection with this, with the functions of the *magisterium*. What is the effective authority of terminological dogma, and how is its interpretation to be regulated? The controversy surrounding Hans Küng’s *Infallible* occasioned much pointed discussion along these lines. Still, we should not forget that the question had already come up much earlier, and in a far quieter, more speculative context, when Rahner was pleading for an alternative terminology in trinitarian theology.
Terminological Dogma: From Meaning to Function

Now what is interesting—certainly from an “Ongian” point of view—is that Rahner, in treating the problems connected with terminological dogma, refers only to the problem of meaning involved. His theme is, invariably, that the meaning of these dogmatic expressions is relative: i.e., relative to the original kerygmatic expressions, to other approaches to the same mystery, to the ecclesiological issue of unity in believing, and ultimately to the mystery involved in and behind the proposition. Rahner is not by any means alone in treating the issue in this way. In fact, while his distinctive contribution lies in his particular conception of the “relativity” of doctrine, and in his reasons for it, he scarcely differs with any other theologian on the basic question as to what the issue is, namely, one of meaning: the interpretation of terminological doctrines is a cognitive matter. It is both interesting and a bit surprising to watch such a sensitive and eloquent stylist as Rahner agreeing with most of his colleagues, and even with the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on this basic point.

The observation just made is important. It involves the realization that terminological dogma is widely regarded, among theologians, as regulated language. Hence the standard practice of interpretation: one concentrates on a fixed dogmatic text (preferably set in its historical, and especially its literary, context) in order to establish what this particular doctrine means.

This essay is written to suggest that this focus on the cognitive (in Ongian terms, the chiefly visual) function of doctrine is incomplete. Dogmatic propositions, even the most terminological ones, can, and often do, also function in affective (that is to say, predominantly oral-acoustical) fashion. We will argue, therefore, that terminological dogma often involves the regulation of speech. To make this case, some preliminary observations of a general linguistic nature are in order.

Connotation in Natural Language

The distinction most frequently used to deal with the way words function is that between denotation and connotation: words “say” more than that which is amenable to our cognitive constructs. Words connote. That is part of their attractiveness: they are not only precise;
they are also eloquent. This applies not only to individual words, but also, and even more, to word-complexes: they say more than they say. This means, very concretely, that they betray, even in written or printed form, that they “address,” not only issues, but also people in situations: they create an audience in the very act of conveying thought. Much of the time, such situations and audiences are incidental: many utterances are ad hoc, fleeting, and impermanent; most language is the verbal accompaniment of the ways in which we do this, that, and the other thing with Tom, Dick, and Harry.

But there are situations that are more permanent, and they are characterized by stable patterns of connotative language-use, especially if those situations are “natural”: the family, the village, the tribe, even the school. These permanent human configurations are characterized, as Walter Ong has not tired of pointing out, by language-use that is strongly formulary: myths, epics, sagas, legends, proverbs, tribal histories, family stories, playground cant, and what have you. Notice that the term “connotation” is really too weak to convey all that is involved here; it is better to resort to a term like “function” to approach the issue. The formulary usages of more or less permanent natural human configurations function as the bearers of the group’s identity, and those who speak and listen in these situations react, not so much to what is said or heard, as to the way the words are used appropriately, i.e., as a function of the understanding and the loyalty that hold the group together. In joining such a group, we learn the usage before we get the understanding.

Meaning and Use of Terms

In what we have said so far, we have been dealing with the formulary use of natural language, whose constitutive elements are what we know as words—“regular” words. But our language, even our everyday language, employs not only words, but also terms: special words, usually (though by no means always) derived from foreign roots; words which you have to know how to pronounce and use right, because they tend to have very precise, usually abstract meanings laid down by definition. In other words, terms are maximally denotive, at least in intention; in fact, one definition of “term” is: a word without connotations, to be used exclusively in the service of rational discourse about objective realities. Yet at the same time, terms look and sound, certainly
to the non-initiated, a lot like *formulas*, and so the question arises: do terms also function as bearers of community loyalty?

The answer is obvious: yes. But we must be careful here. In natural language, there is a close, spontaneous connection between the meaning of a word and its appropriate use, between its cognitive meaning and its rhetorical impact. In the case of terms, no such close connection prevails. Terms mean what they are defined to mean, and hence, the rules for their appropriate use are rather more extrinsic to their meaning. Armed with this knowledge, we can easily see how terms function as bearers of community loyalty: terms bestow “membership in the profession,” but only on those who both understand what they mean and have learned to use them appropriately.

**“Displacement” of Terms**

Now it is one of the characteristics of our technological, highly literate age that “sounding educated” often means “using technical terminology”; we associate knowledge with expertise, with a panoply of technical terms—that is to say, with cognitive meaning as it is shared among professionals. But this also means that we live in an age in which many terms are liable to revert, as it were, to the realm of natural language. Terms are born at one or more removes from natural language; then, on account of the spread of education, the popularization of professional knowledge, and the authority of such knowledge, hundreds of terms find their way back into natural language. This chain of events creates a very real problem, which is connected with the relatively loose link between the meaning of a term and its appropriate use. When a term is used outside the sphere of rational discourse, some of the normal ambiguity and vagueness of natural language comes back to it, but in an uncontrolled way, “through the back door, dragging along a number of implicit assumptions not always easily detected.”

There is nothing necessarily sinister in this, though it is true that advertisers, mellow-speakers, and ideologues abuse precisely this quality of terms in the interest of “hidden persuasion”: lots of prejudice and unexamined loyalty is expressed and promoted by means of computereese, sociologese, journalese, economese, nationalese, theologese. The problem is not that the quasi-natural-language use of terms conveys and creates non-professional loyalties, but that these loyalties are hard
to examine. That is why operators, fast talkers, rhetoricians, and sophists—the well-intentioned as well as the unscrupulous, and also the merely mindless—love to use terms: there’s no loyalty like unexamined loyalty.

Terminological Dogma and the Profession of Loyalty

*Abusus non tollit usum* is one of the many oral maxims once taught in seminaries: the fact that something is abused is no reason for its abolition. While it is right to conclude from the foregoing that terminological doctrine is likely to be *correctly understood and used* only by a small minority of professionals, it is wrong to conclude that only professionals *may* use it. The Christian tradition has, at any rate, encouraged the opposite. Terminology has become part of the ordinary, that is to say, the live, oral-acoustical profession of faith. What we should also conclude, however, is that the non-professional use of doctrinal terminology can be expected to involve not so much meaning or precise understanding as profession of loyalty, and that this will show in a certain lack of proportion between the term’s (rhetorical) significance and its (cognitive) meaning.

This essay will test this hypothesis in the case of three terminological doctrinal definitions, viz., Jesus Christ’s consubstantiality with the Father in Godhead; the change, by transubstantiation, of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ; and the infallibility of the ecclesiastical magisterium in matters of faith and morals.

**Homoousios**

Christ’s “consubstantiality with the Father” occurs in the Creed promulgated at Nicaea in 325 A.D. It found its way into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: “And [we believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, . . . of one substance [*homoousion*] with the Father.” It is part of the tradition of the undivided Church. The term has a very precise meaning: every predicate attributable to the Father must also be attributed to Christ, except “Father”; Christ is the Son. However, several observations are in order.

First, this clarity is the product of hindsight. Anyone familiar with the Arian controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries knows how
long it took before this precise focus was a matter of consensus. That Arius was wrong was, perhaps, not too hard to establish, but at the time, many found the remedy worse than the disease: how prudent was it to commit the Churches to the mandatory use of a new, non-biblical and hence, suspect technical term—*homoousios*? While it took care of Arianism, it might well cause more undesirable problems in the future. And indeed, it took the best part of the fourth century to discover, in the course of much confusing debate and episcopal and imperial politicking, just how restricted—if crucial—the area of affirmation covered by *homoousios* really was. And this lack of precision has continued. I have met a theologian who was less than entirely clear on the point!

Secondly, this lack of precision in the fourth and fifth centuries did not prevent the term from being abundantly used—mainly as an ecclesiastical loyalty-flag. But since the fourth century also witnessed the gradual establishment of orthodox Christianity as the sole religion permitted in the Empire (Theodosius, *Cunctos populos*, 380 A.D.), the emperors, both of the West and of the East, developed a taste for applying *homoousios* as a civil loyalty test, too. Similarly, but on the other side, we have the professed Arianism of the Ostrogoths under Theodoric and his successors in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, over against the orthodoxy of the old Roman establishment, over which they held military sway. Thus, there is every reason to doubt the strictly theological significance of both.

This enormous disproportion between the (chiefly oral) use of *homoousios* as a loyalty-marker and its (literate) use to express orthodoxy is paralleled by the use of transubstantiation, albeit with a difference.

**Transubstantiation**

In the Latin church, “transubstantiation” defines the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ at the Eucharist. The dogma was first laid down by the fourth Lateran Council of 1215. More than three centuries later, in 1551, the Council of Trent picks up the terminology, stating that the substances of bread and wine are entirely changed into the substances of the Body and Blood of Christ, and adding that this change has been aptly and properly been called
transubstantiation. Now the question is, What is the reason for the aptness and propriety of the term? What, in other words, is the target of the affirmation? The question is of great ecumenical significance, for acceptance of transubstantiation separates the Catholic Church from the Reformation.

It turns out that the meaning of “transubstantiation” is surprisingly restricted. Around the time of the fourth Lateran Council, “transubstantiation” and the affirmation of the real presence were simply “two sides of a single coin,”\(^\text{14}\) with no affirmations implied about the way in which the real presence was thought (or imagined) to come about. In fact, authorities like Peter of Capua and Lothar of Segni (who as Pope Innocent III was to preside over Lateran IV), regarded the three prevalent theories about the coming about of the real presence (“consubstantiation,” “annihilation,” and “transubstantiation”) a matter of theological opinion,\(^\text{15}\) even though they themselves favored the third explanation. At this point in time, therefore, “transubstantiation” serves two purposes. In the conciliar definition of Lateran IV, it is a term used as a natural word; it simply affirms the real presence. By contrast, as a term among theologians it defines one of three ways in which the real presence was responsibly thought to come about. Not till a generation later does Aquinas argue that annihilation and consubstantiation are both illogical and heretical, and only transubstantiation orthodox; interestingly, though, he does not quote Lateran IV in support of his position. Fifty years later, Scotus and Ockam disagree with Aquinas: they find consubstantiation intellectually more attractive than transubstantiation, but since Lateran IV has made the latter an article of faith, they consider “transubstantiation” simply a matter of authoritative doctrine, not of conceptual understanding. This, of course, goes a long way towards explaining why the only claim Trent made in regard to the term “transubstantiation” was that the real change of the eucharistic elements is “aptly and properly so named.” It is as simple as that, and besides, stated in a relative clause as it is, it hardly passes the test of defined doctrine.

“Transubstantiation” is an intriguing term, a fact which helps to explain why it has functioned so prominently in theological debate and controversy, even down to our own day. At the same time, the doctrine of transubstantiation is conceptually feeble: while stating the real presence, it does not furnish any insight into its structure. This, however,
has not prevented it from being vigorously alleged as a mark of loyalty. In this regard, it both resembles *Homoousios*, and differs from it: like *homoousios*, “transubstantiation” functions as a loyalty-badge, but whereas *homoousios* can be shown to have a very precise logic, “transubstantiation” is little more than an authoritative term of considerable oral-acoustical weight to convey and commend the realism of the Catholic eucharistic tradition.

**Infallible Magisterium**

Infallibility expresses the freedom from error in teaching faith and morals enjoyed by the Church’s teaching office, whether papal or collegial-episcopal, under certain conditions. The exercise of infallible papal magisterium was defined at the first Vatican Council in 1870; episcopal-collegial infallibility, while made much of at Vatican II, has never been formally defined.

In a fairly recent book, the nature of magisterial authority, both of the “non-definitive” and the “definitive” (infallible) kind, has been explained with exquisite clarity. What is striking in the book, from a literary point of view, is the care with which its author argues the limitations of infallible magisterium—something which may worry some readers. What is especially striking is the way in which the author argues the limits of the object of infallibility. Thus, for instance, he denies that matters of natural law can ever be the object of infallible teaching by the ordinary universal magisterium—a position highly relevant to the interpretation of *Humanae vitae*. Yet while stressing the limits of infallibility, the book clearly shows a high esteem for the teaching office, and it does everything to commend a responsible, mature attitude of respect and obedience, on the part of the faithful, toward all authentic teaching in the Church, whether non-definitive or definitive.

The reason behind this apparently negative tendency in the book is not far to seek: while the target area of infallibility as a defined doctrine is very narrow—and relatively few theologians and bishops are so keenly aware of this as Francis Sullivan—its non-professional use as a loyalty-marker is extremely broad. The latter use really bears out the characteristic Catholic faith-attitude. This attitude is not so much concerned with the precise definition of the pope’s infallibility, as with a particular practice of universal papal jurisdiction and episcopal
governing authority, which is vastly more influential in everyday life in the Church than the infallibility-dogma. Again, as in the case of homoousios and transubstantiation, the term infallibility shows a big gap between its professional, literate use as a cognitive counter, and its natural-language, oral-acoustical use as a loyalty-marker.

Three Conclusions

This essay has been written to illustrate how Catholic theology has gained enormously from the two influences at work in Karl Rahner’s theological achievement: the formal-literate and the rhetorical-literary. It has also been written to say that in the latter area theology stands to gain even more from the insights of scholars like Walter J. Ong if it wants to overcome its one-sidedly cognitive biases, which are noticeable even in so literary a theologian as Karl Rahner. Hence, three conclusions to wind up.

First, dogma is a determination, or normative regulation, not only of language, in the form of canonized pronouncements authoritatively taught, but also of speech, in the form of formulary professions of faith and loyalty couched in “displaced” terminological language. The two must be carefully distinguished, so that both may be truly appreciated.

Second, there tends to be a notable gap between the meaning of terminological dogmatic language and its use in the ordinary profession of faith. This realization should influence the practice of theological hermeneutics: theologians should ask not just what certain dogmatic formulas mean, or meant, in cognitive terms, to theological professionals, but also in the interest of what affective concerns they are, or were, regularly used.

Third, loyalty is fine, but the formulas that carry it are often the carriers of prejudice, too. This has special relevance to ecumenical theology. It is easier to change minds than habits of speech; different ideas can coexist, side by side, in the same space, while different voices are harmonious only if they are “in synch.” In many areas of the faith, it is not doctrine that separates us, but formulas. They need not do so, provided the different formulas are given equal time, so that all involved can attune the ears of faith to them.
Notes


5. Translated into English as Karl Rahner, “What is a Dogmatic Statement?” Theological Investigations (New York: DLT, Seabury, and Helicon, 1961), V, 42-66, esp. 54-58; henceforth cited as TI,
6. The concept of Sprachregelung is found even earlier, in an essay on the encyclical Mystici Corporis. There, in a footnote, Rahner uses the phrase terminologische Festlegung, which was less than felicitously translated into English as “determined terminology.” See “Membership of the Church According to the Teaching of Pius XII’s Encyclical Mystici Corporis Christi,” TI, II, 1-88; cited at 66, n. 83. Volumes I-X of the original Schriften zur Theologie are covered by the Rahner-Register, ed. Karl H. Neufeld and Roman Bleistein (Zürich, Einsiedeln, and Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1974), presented to Rahner on the occasion of his 70th birthday. Volumes XI-XVI of the Schriften zur Theologie have (incomplete) indices; the word Sprachregelung does not occur in them. In a book review, John Galvin points out that in TI, XVIII (the English translation of most of Schriften, XIII), the phrase “linguistic usage” (25-28, 51, 110) reflects German Sprachregelung—an obvious mistranslation (see The Heythrop Journal, 25 (1984): 367.
13. This live profession has taken two characteristically oral-acoustical shapes. The first is liturgy; the Creed, including its technical terms, is recited by heart and even sung at Sunday Eucharist. The second is catechesis (Gk. katechesis, meaning “oral instruction,” etymologically connected with “echo”), which reflects ancient “repeat-after-me” and other question-and-answer teaching habits to cultivate loyalty as much as orthodoxy; cf. Lk 2, 46 and John 16, 30, where “questioning” means “teaching.”
15. “Consubstantiation” explains the real presence by holding that, after the consecration, the substances both of the Body and Blood of Christ and of the bread and wine coexist in union with each other. “Annihilation” explains it by positing a replacement of the substances of bread and wine—which are annihilated—by the substances of the Body and Blood of Christ. “Transubstantiation” explains it by stating that the substances of bread and wine are changed into the substances of Christ’s Body and Blood.
“Lost and Found” in Luke 15:  
Biblical Interpretation and Self-Involvement

for Margy and Rick

We live in space and time. Even our two most sophisticated senses, sight and hearing, can work only in space and time, as Immanuel Kant well saw. Nevertheless, differentiation is the name of the sensory game. There exists a very sophisticated natural affinity between seeing, analysis, space, understanding, and ideas; analogously, an only slightly vaguer natural affinity prevails between hearing, synthesis, time, trust, and affectivity. Yet for all its acuity of vision, the eye cannot say to the ear, “I do not need you.” Let us apply this piece of wisdom about the twin steeples of the human sensorium, sight and hearing, together with a few items from Greek grammar, to the fifteenth chapter of the third gospel.

* * * * *

Let us begin with a translation of the chapter—at first blush, an unduly free one.

Now all the toll collectors and the sinners were crowding Jesus, listening to him; and the Pharisees as well as the Torah-experts were muttering among themselves: “This man keeps the company of sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable, as follows. “Which of you, owning a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine on their own in the desert and go after the one that got itself lost, until he finds it? And once he finds it, he is happy to put it on his own shoulders, and when he
gets home he calls his friends and his neighbors together and tells them, ‘Be happy with me, for I have found my sheep, which got itself lost.’ Let me tell you: this is how there will be joy in heaven because of one sinner converting, rather than because of ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of conversion.

Or take a woman who has ten drachmas: if she should lose one drachma, would she not fix a light and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And once she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, and tells them, ‘Be happy with me, for I have found the drachma I lost.’ Let me tell you: this is how there will be joy among God’s angels because of one sinner converting.”

But then he said: “Somebody had two sons. And the younger of the two told his father: ‘Father, give me my rightful portion of the estate.’ So he divided his estate for them. And a few days later the younger son got everything together and left home for a distant land, and there squandered everything he had, living it up beyond any possibility of recovery. But as he was spending away, a serious famine spread everywhere in that country, and he began to run out. And he took to the road and committed himself to some citizen in that country, and he sent him to his farmlands to tend the swine. And he would have loved to fill his belly with the pods the swine were eating; and nobody offered him anything. Then it was he came to himself. He said, ‘How many of my father’s day laborers have food aplenty, and here I am, getting myself starved to death. I will get up and travel to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against God and in your face; I am no longer fit to call myself your son; treat me as some day laborer of yours.’ And up and off he went, to his own father.

Now while he was still at a long distance his father saw him, and was filled with pity, and he ran out, fell around his neck, and covered him with kisses. But the son said to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against God and in your face; I am no longer fit to call myself your son.’ Yet the father told his servants: ‘Quick, get the best dress and put it on him, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, and fetch the fatted calf,
slaughter it as the Law prescribes, and let us feast and make merry together. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and let himself be found.’ So they started making merry.

But his elder son was out in the field, and when on his way home he approached the house, he heard music-making and dancing going on. And he called some houseboy to himself and inquired just what might be going on. And he told him: ‘Your brother has arrived, and you father has had the fatted calf slaughtered, because he has gotten him back safe and sound.’ But he got angry and did not care to come in. So his father came out to plead with him. But he replied to his father: ‘Look, so many years have I been a servant to you, and I have never failed to follow any order, and you have never given me a kid to make merry with my friends. But now that this son of yours arrives, who has devoured the living you worked for in the company of lewd idolaters, you have slaughtered the fatted calf for him.’ But he told him: “Dear child, you are always with me, and everything that is mine is yours; but, by God, we are to make merry together and enjoy ourselves, since this brother of yours was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and let himself be found.”

Luke 15 is a literary composition in its own right, i.e., apart from any indebtedness to sources. As such, it invites analysis and intellectuality. Still, its unity resides not just in its written, visual form but also in its rhetoric; like every writing in the New Testament, it is written down only to be read out loud and heard, i.e., to be performed and received in one piece, synthetically, affectively.

The two opening verses are a Lucan favorite, defining both the occasion and the target audience: on the one hand, Jesus, crowded, typically, by “all the toll collectors and the sinners”—bad company, yet hanging on his words (ἀκούειν αὐτοῦ); on the other hand, “both the [οἱ τε] Pharisees and the [καὶ οἱ] Torah-experts (γραμματεῖς).” The two groups’ divergent attitudes toward Jesus are conveyed by a sample of that favorite figure of speech in pre-literate and early-literate cultures, the play upon words: ἐγγίζοντες-διογγύζοντες—an oral-acoustical contrastive parallel only awkwardly rendered by something
like “close company” and “carping complainers.” Lots of black preachers in North America could (and would) do better, on the spur of the moment (though in reality they have puns by the dozens in their memory stores, ready to go, to hold the happy pew’s smiling attention).

A second feature of Luke 15 (and one which must be remembered in the interpretation of any New Testament text) is allusio—literally, “indirectly playing with something.” Allusion is to be understood not so much as the practice of calculated quotation, whether “literal” or not, but oral-acoustically, i.e., as “biblical background music”—idioms perhaps only dimly familiar to the listener, yet somehow reminiscent of the whole wide world of faith created by God’s Word at work in the Tradition. In the case of Luke 15, Joseph A. Fitzmyer’s commentary offers instances of allusio as touching as they are illuminating. Thus, to mention only two instances, the younger son’s confession “Father, I have sinned against God and in your face” echo Pharaoh’s desperate words to Moses and Aaron; likewise, the portrayal of the father “falling around [his son’s] neck” recalls Jacob’s relief at his meeting with his dreaded brother Esau, and Joseph’s deep emotion at the encounter with Benjamin and his other brothers in Egypt.

Another oral-acoustical feature of Luke 15 is a figure of speech often called fortiora-fortia-fortissima, as follows. In due time, three items get lost: a sheep, a coin, and a younger brother. They are, in order, a prized animal, a valued object, and a treasured person. The sequence squarely places the culmination of the series in the third story: the “prodigal son.” The effect is enhanced by the fact that Jesus’ direct speech is interrupted by “But then he said” (Εἶπεν δὲ; v. 11).

A fourth figure of speech is repetitio: the return of identical words or turns of phrase throughout the passage even as it is heard. In this case, the turns of phrase are several, as we shall see. The words repeated are mainly verbs: “hear,” “lose” and “lost,” and “find” and “found.”

Yet there are differences. In the case of the lost drachma, the responsibility for the loss is emphatically placed on the woman: “if she should lose just one drachma” (v. 8; emphasis added) and “the drachma I lost” (v. 9); accordingly, the finite forms are simply in the active voice: ἀπολέσῃ, ἀπώλεσα. The case of the sheep is a bit different. The shepherd does lose (ἀπολέσας) the one sheep, but when he goes out (πορεύεται) to find the animal a note of sympathy is sounded: he goes out because of (ἐπὶ) the sheep, which becomes “the one that has gotten
itself completely lost”: τὸ ἀπολωλός—the middle participle of the resultative perfect tense. For its sake, he wanders all over till he finds it (rawer ἀυτό), and willingly carries it home on his shoulders and calls “his friends and his neighbors” in to share in the joy (συγχαρήτε μοι). The story ends with another repetitio: the shepherd does almost literally the same as the woman will do after she recovers her coin (vv. 6, 9). After all, the point of both parables is God’s joy over “one repenting sinner” (ἐπὶ ἐνὶ ἀμαρτωλῷ μετανοοῦντι: v. 7, 10). Unsurprisingly, neither the coin nor the sheep are invited; they are not company.

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In the case of the younger son, however, there is no question that he gets himself lost. He does so by first impudently claiming his share of his father’s property and leaving, to have a life of his own somewhere else, “living it up beyond possibility of recovery” (ζῶν ἀσώτως; v. 13): nobody at home knows where he is or what has become of him. His elder brother will not be exaggerating when he sums up the scrape his younger brother has gotten himself into by describing him to his father as “that son of yours who has devoured (ὁ καταφαγὼν) the living you worked for (σου τὸν βίον) in the company of lewd idolaters (μετὰ πορνών).”

The understanding that the younger son is acting on his own is implied throughout the narrative; he is the subject of the highest number of narrative sentences—about a dozen of them. He demands his share of the property. He leaves home and sets out on his disastrous journey. He wastes his fortune. When he feels the pinch, he picks up and commits himself (κολλήθη) to some local citizen, who puts him in charge of his swine—to Jewish ears, godforsaken dirty work in every sense of the word. Being without food, the boy is driven to extremes: he would even have loved to fill his belly with the pods the swine were eating (if only he could have gotten himself to do so),8 and nobody offers him anything in the way of (human) food. He comes to his senses. He realizes he is getting himself totally lost (πόλλῳ). He decides to “let on”—i.e., to “up and travel (ἀναστὰς πορεύσομαι)”9 to his father, with a prepared speech: “Father, I have sinned against God and in your face (ἡμαρτον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐνωπιόν σου), I am
no longer fit (أخبار) to call myself (κληθναι) your son; treat me as some laborer of yours (ἐνα των μισθιων σου).” And he does up and go (ἀναστὰς ἠλθεν) to his own (ἐσωτερικον) father, who, on the look-out, sights him from afar and filled with pity and love, comes running out, throws his arms around his neck, and covers him with kisses. He starts his prepared speech. The father does not even bother to hear him out; the boy never gets to beg for a place among the day laborers—the outsiders on the ancient homestead, working only for food or money. For the father is already issuing orders to his domestic servants (των δουλων αυτον) to get his boy dressed festively, and to fetch the fatted calf, kill it as the Torah prescribes (θυσατε), and join in the feasting and general merrymaking. The reason: “This child of mine was dead and has come back to life (ἀνέζησεν), he had gotten himself lost beyond retrieval (πολωλα; cf. το άπολωλδς, said of the sheep) and is now found (εσθερη).” So the merrymaking begins. Obviously, it takes sinners and those who feel for them to enjoy company—a pointed reminder of the chapter’s opening line.

This sets the stage for the father’s encounter with his elder son—the counterpart of Jesus’ dissonant critics mentioned in the opening verses, as we will see. For now, however, one last grammatical-rhetorical feature in the first part of the parable requires our attention.

There is no doubt that the aorist passive ἐκολληθη (v. 15) has a reflexive meaning: “he committed himself to someone.” There is little or no doubt that the meaning of το άπολωλδς, άπόλλυμι, and άπολωλδς (vv. 6, 17, and 24, repeated at 32) is reflexive, too: both the sheep and the kid have gotten themselves lost—the former in the shepherd’s eyes, the latter in both his own eyes and his father’s. Besides, in the country where he is a nobody to start with, the boy decides he cannot proudly call himself (κληθναι) his father’s son any longer—another reflexive phrase, which he repeats even after his father has unmistakably welcomed him (v. 21). Even the father’s call for celebration shows this grammatical feature: the verbal form εὕφρανθωμεν, a hortative passive-voice aorist, has once again a reflexive meaning: “let us make each other merry”—i.e., “let us be merry together”; the text gives us no grounds for assuming that the family servants—never mind others of even less consequence, say, the hired laborers—are excluded from the celebration. Now in this context, is it not tempting
to interpret εὑρέθη (v. 24: “he was found”—another passive aorist) as “he let himself be found”? Let us see.

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The account of the father’s encounter with his elder son begins with a startling repetitio: just as the toll collectors and the sinners are surrounding Jesus (ἐγγίζοντες) and hanging on his words (ἀκούειν αὐτοῦ), the elder boy comes close (τῇγίσεν) to the house and hears unexpected music-making and dancing going on (ήκουσεν συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν—no definite article). He “gets angry” (ὁργίσθη). Is this a faint echo of διογγύζοντες—i.e., another oral-acoustical contrastive parallel? It could be, especially if the reader should make a point of sounding it out that way. Also, does this passive aorist have a reflexive meaning, too? In other words, is he “getting himself angry”? Are we to understand that a latent preparedness to take offense is the elder brother’s first reaction to any merrymaking? No wonder, after arrogantly asking one of the “boys” (ἐνα τῶν παίδων) “just what might be going on” (τί ἐν εἴη ταύτα) and learning that his brother is back “safe and sound” (ὑγιαίνοντα), he “did not care to come in” (οὐκ ἦθελεν εἰσελθεῖν), so his father comes outside to play the advocate (παρεκάλει). The elder son is unwilling; his refusal to join in the merrymaking is painfully matched by his resentful complaint to his father: he has never been given as much as a kid to “have a good time for myself with my friends” (ἔνα μετὰ τῶν φίλων μου ἐψφρανθῶ). Ἐψφρανθῶ[µεν] is the very word the father had used on his younger son’s arrival; the merrymaking which the elder son protests he never got to enjoy for himself is of the opposite kind: exclusive partying away from home—the kind that is apt to turn into something else.

The son’s implicit point—“I am the sole heir to this estate”—evokes an immediate counterpoint, which also serves to introduce the closing line of the chapter as a whole. The father says: “My child, you are always with me, and whatever is mine is yours. But by God, we had to (ἐδεῖ) make merry together (ἐψφρανθῶναι) and be joyful (χαρᾶναι).”

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In this way, the text ends on a note of consonance, with Jesus commending the cheerfulness of the chapter as a whole: the general
merrymaking after the younger son’s arrival and the common joy of the shepherd and the housewife with their friends and neighbors. Both are conveyed by two passive aorists, the latter chiming in with the invitations of the shepherd and the housewife (συγχάρητέ µοι). And finally, there is Jesus’ urgent invitation to his critics: “This brother of yours was dead and has come to life, and having gotten himself lost, he let himself be found (εὐρέθη; cf. v. 24)—another passive aorist.

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One last observation on the text of Luke’s fifteenth chapter. Strikingly, there is no mention of either recovery or return in the piece, even though both verbs are part of Luke’s vocabulary. Could it be that in the world of Luke 15, where the differences between losing and finding are obviously real, there is a wider horizon? Does the chapter imply that in the end both getting lost and getting found are occurring within the one universe accounted for by one and the same Father, who has no enemies and thus, will never agree to let either the world or humanity run their course apart from him? Do the words, “all that is mine is yours” imply “world without end”?

If it does, we can go to the Nicene creed for a parallel: “I believe in one God, Father, Sovereign Ruler of all that is” (Πιστεύω εἶς ἕνα Θεόν, Πατέρα παντοκράτορα). God is God of Gods and Lord of Lords: nothing lost or runaway can defeat God’s design for creation. The boy’s father is in no hurry; he is waiting. In the end, there will be joy.

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Are we overinterpreting? Who knows? But there are moments in the New Testament that suggest we are not. The significant passive voice, for example, is not a grammatical quirk limited to Luke 15. A much older writing already shows it. Paul writes to the Galatians: “Now that you have come to know God (γνώντες θεόν)—but more importantly, now that you have come to be known by God (γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ)—how can you go back to the feeble and starveling powers to which you want to enslave yourselves again?” (Gal 4, 9a). It is inconceivable that Paul considers the new Christians to have not been known by God at all until recently; there has to be something new the matter
here, and it has to be a matter of actual, shared experience to the Galatians themselves, for Paul appeals to that experience throughout. So is it not wise to forget about the semi-Pelagian debates five centuries later and boldly translate, “now that you have let yourselves be known by God”? In other words, “Do you not realize that you have accepted yourselves as God’s own children, with the God-given freedom which this new self-acceptance involves?” In the first letter to the Corinthians a similar expression occurs, except that its underlying theme is not freedom but love—a theme hardly unknown in the letter to the Galatians. Paul writes, “All those who think they have come to know something do not yet know the way they are meant to know (εἰ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι, οὐπω ἐγνω καθὼς δεῖ γνώναι); but those who love—they are the ones who (show that they) are known by God” (εἰ δέ τις ἁγαπᾷ, οὗτος ἐγνωσται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ). That is, by faith in Jesus Christ, they know who they are. Small wonder Paul acknowledges he regards himself as “known.” Liberated and loved, he can afford to “let on.” Paul uses the rhetoric of self-involvement—something the Church Fathers, for all their literary sophistication, were to continue.

Time to conclude. Why pay attention to rhetorical and oral-acoustical details and implied reflexives (both of them self-involving features) in a New Testament text? Let us pass over in silence one obvious reason already mentioned: all New Testament writings were written down to ensure reliable oral performance at community meetings. But for close to a century and a half now, the art of biblical interpretation has been largely a matter of cut-and-paste, with spectacular results. Yet this largely visual, academic, and (allegedly) theologically impartial approach has raised the question: is living faith now implicitly regarded an irritant to the objectifying mind reading and studying in silence? One would hope not.

But if not, then the written Word of God remains trenchant, and Bible-scholars must learn how to listen. While it takes a robust head to study and teach, scholars, too, are not entirely unmoved by what happens in their chests: air, breath, affect. Obviously, here the question of controls becomes very difficult: it is much harder to establish whether what I “hear” is part of the biblical author’s intent or just the
result of my familiarity with the world of Scripture as a whole. But that ambiguity (and the scholarly duty to accept it) is the price of print literacy.\textsuperscript{21} For faith is the fruit of (affective) hearing,\textsuperscript{22} so sight is at least to some degree subject to affect: \textit{ubi amor ibi oculus}.$^2$ So we theologians can do worse than systematically use our eyes and heads in the service of our chests, where (among many other things) the Spirit of Love urges us to speak, or rather, to say something—let’s say, “The Word.” He is alive in the Spirit, and has use for both our hearts and our voices (not to mention our ears). Thus, far from being the academic theologian’s poor relative, some form of live faith is his faithful, inspiring wife or her ditto husband. And we all know that around live spouses, we sense something live is going on, never mind the exact word for it; analogously, theology properly professed never turns a life into a neutral academic venture, not even at universities.

Notes

Published in \textit{The Expository Times} 114 (2003): 399-404. Slightly touched up.


2. See 1 Cor 12, 21.

3. It combines a description of Jesus caught between sinners and righteous people, common to Mark and Q. See Mk 2, 15-17, parr. Mt 9, 10-13; Lk 5, 29-32; cf. 19, 7. 10. Of the three parables, the first hails from Q, whereas the second and third are single tradition in Lk. Synoptic comparison will lead to the conclusion that the final redactor’s contribution to Lk 15 is decisive, and so, vital to the chapter’s exegesis.

4. See Lk 5, 29-32; 19, 7. 10.


7. The only difference is that the shepherd invites “his friends and his neighbors” (\textit{τούς φίλους καὶ τούς γείτονας}), while in the woman’s case the second definite article is omitted; she invites “her friends and neighbors” (\textit{τὰς
8. Gk. ἐπιθυμέω. For the interpretation of ἐπιθυμέω as conveying an unfulfilled wish, see Joachim Jeremias, Die Gleichnisse Jesu, 8th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1970), 183, nn. 1-3. Jeremias refers to four instances in the third gospel (Lk 15, 16; 16, 21; 17, 22; 22, 15), where ἐπιθυμέω has this meaning.

9. Note the absence of any allusion to return. He simply goes. It is a new beginning.

10. Two points. Unlike English “worthy,” which normally establishes a proper relationship on the part of an inferior term with regard to a superior (i.e., normative) one, Greek ἔξιος states a relationship of mutual “fit,” even between unequals. Secondly, in this case, since the boy is still away from home and at odds only with himself, it is wise to explain the aorist κληθναι as (in Moulton’s phrase) a “formal passive with middle meaning” (i.e., as reflexive). Hence, “I am no longer fit to call myself your son.” Note that in Homeric and Hesiodic Greek, κληθναι (“proudly identifying oneself as”) is the near-equivalent of “being.”

11. Κολλέω (“to glue,” “to stick”) is a favorite verb in Luke-Acts: cf. Lk 10, 11 (said of dust); Acts 5, 13 (“getting involved”); 8, 29; 9, 26 (“join,” “get in with”); 10, 28 (“associate with”); 17, 34 (“stick with”). In all instances, a reflexive translation would be appropriate.

12. In this regard, the third parable differs most obviously from the first two: neither the sheep nor the coin are invited to the party; as already stated, they are not company.

13. Note the parallel ἔνα τῶν μισθίων σου — ἔνα τῶν παιδῶν. A day laborer (μίσθιος) does not “belong”; he is a nameless outsider. When the runaway younger brother understood he was lost, he had found himself deserving of the contempt with which day laborers were routinely treated: “Treat me as some day laborer of yours.” Both by contrast and analogously, the elder boy is treating a trusted domestic servant with gratuitous disdain, calling him as one would routinely call “some houseboy.” Note also the optative + ἄν—archaic in Koine, and in the New Testament found solely in Lk-Acts (Lk 1, 62; 6, 11; 9, 46; 15, 26; 18, 36 [?]; Acts 5, 24; 8, 31; 10, 17). In every case except Lk 18, 36 (where the text is uncertain) the syntagma serves to express irritation in the face of surprise, ranging from puzzlement to acute annoyance. Here, it would appear to connote both caustic bluster and disdain. On a related point, is it conceivable that the phrase ἐνί τῶν πολίτων (“some citizen”; v. 15) implies disdain, too?

14. Note the tacit allusion to God’s plan: cf. Lk 24, 26, coll. 2, 49; 9, 22 ().

15. Cf. also vv. 6, 18, 27, 30. For ἁνευρίσκω (“retrieve”), see Lk 2, 16; Acts 21, 4; its meaning is “to discover those who/that which you already know are/is
there for you to discover them/it.” For ἐπανέρχομαι (“return”), see Lk 10, 35; 19, 15.
16. See, for example, Gal 5, 13-15.
17. 1 Cor 8, 3; I am adopting the lectio difficilior suggested by P46. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, second ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/German Bible Society, 1994), 490-91.
18. Επεγνώσθη; 1 Cor 13, 12.
21. Here what comes to mind is William Empson’s provocative *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York: New Directions, 1949),
22. Cf. Rom 10, 17; Gal 3, 2. 5.
23. Aquinas, *In III Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, r. [32].