

☆ CHAPTER 1 ☆

PSALM AIDS
TO STUDYING THE PSALTER

“Truth,” Bertrand de Margerie says, “is the Trinity.”¹ This is because the Trinity explains *who* God is, not just *what* God does. Thus, all theology must flow from this ultimate truth and all of the mysteries of faith, understood in its light.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes the distinction, therefore, between *theologia* and *oikonomia*. The *theologia* explains *who* God is (i.e., the Trinity), while the *oikonomia* explains *what* God does in history (such as the covenants with the Patriarchs and Israel, the Exodus, etc.). Through His work in history, especially through the covenants, God reveals to us who He is.

This is not all that different from our own experience with other human beings. A man might reveal his feelings for a woman by leaving her a bouquet of roses. We have all heard the phrase “actions speak louder than words,” so we know that through our actions we truly reveal ourselves to other people.

At the same time, we also understand another person’s actions much better once we come to truly know that person. The woman who received the roses will understand more clearly the other actions of the man who gave them to her. Before he gave them to her, she might have noticed that he acted quirky around her, but now she realizes that he

¹ Bertrand de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1982), xvii.

is nervous because he cares for her. She now knows why he blushes, why he laughs so hard at all her jokes, and why he is always offering to do her favors. After he reveals himself to her, she can better understand the things that he does.

The same is true for God. Not only do we come to know who God is through His actions in salvation history, but we also come to better understand His work in history once we come to know Him. This is what the Catechism teaches:

Through the *oikonomia* the *theologia* is revealed to us; but conversely, the *theologia* illuminates the whole *oikonomia*. God's works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works. So it is, analogously, among human persons. A person discloses himself in his actions, and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions (Catechism, no. 236).

God makes Himself known to us through what He does, yet after He has revealed Himself to us, we can then understand more deeply His dealings with man.

As the *theologia* reveals that God is Father, the *oikonomia* illuminates God's fatherly plan. In fact, *oikonomia* comes from "*oikos*," meaning house, and "*nomos*," meaning law. We can see, then, that the *oikonomia* describes the way God administers His household, the way He Fathers His family. Because of this, any study of theology must start from two primary poles: the Trinity and the Word of God.

The Holiest Family

In the Trinity we see God as Three Persons, forever united in life-giving love. The Father begets the Son and shares with Him His life in love. He gives to the Son all His attributes, so that the Son, like the Father, is eternal, almighty, all-knowing, and all-loving.

The Son, then, is the image of the Father. Yet, in being the Son, the image of the Father, the Son must be like the Father in all things—including imitating the Father’s act of life-giving love. The Son cannot truly be the image of the Father if the Father is pouring His life into the Son and the Son gives nothing in return! The Son, therefore, pours Himself out in life-giving love back to the Father. Moreover, since the Father and the Son pour out Their very life in love, this love itself is personified in another Person, the Holy Spirit. To truly be a son, then, means to pour one’s own life out in life-giving love. As we shall see, this is what God asks of all those he calls to divine sonship, including Adam, Israel, and David.

In all of this, we must emphasize that each of the Three Persons is eternal. God’s inner life is outside of time. We cannot speak of the Father coming *before* the Son or the Spirit coming *after* the Father and the Son. The Three are united from all eternity in their act of life-giving love. This Trinity of life-giving divine Persons is what is described by the *theologia*.

Taking God at His Word

The second major starting point of theology must be Scripture, which recounts God’s actions in history, the *oikonomia*. Scripture is the Word of God in the very words of God (DV 11). Because of this, Scripture is without error and “should be the very soul of sacred theology” (*ibid.*).

We must note here that Scripture cannot be understood apart from the Church’s living Tradition or her teaching office. Indeed, the canon of Scripture, the Bible’s table of contents, was formed for the express purpose of defining what could be read in the Church’s liturgy, which is identified with the Church’s Tradition.² Likewise, the teaching office of

² Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions* (San Diego: Basilica Press, 1966), 354. See also Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter On the Sacred Liturgy *Mediator Dei* (1947), no. 48.

the Magisterium was established by Christ so that Christians would have an authoritative interpreter of Scripture (cf. Mt. 16:18-19; 1 Tim. 3:15). Without the authority of the Church, Christians would have no way of knowing with certainty whether or not the Church had “canonized” the right books as Scripture. Hence, Scripture itself teaches that it is not the “sole” authority (2 Thess. 2:15).

Nonetheless, due to its inspired charism, Scripture is “privileged” and has a certain primacy. Hence, the Pontifical Biblical Commission speaks of the “referential language of Scripture.”³ In addition, Cardinal Ratzinger explains that the “normative theologians are the authors of Scripture,”⁴ because the Bible is “the model of all theology.”⁵ All doctrine and dogma, then, must be understood as the Church’s clarification of the truth conveyed in Scripture. Thus Cardinal Ratzinger explains that dogma is “nothing other than the Church’s infallible interpretation of Scripture.”⁶

Therefore, the two poles for doing theology properly are clearly seen: who God is, the Trinity (the *theologia*) and what God does in history (the *oikonomia*), as recorded in Scripture, the privileged channel of revelation. With this foundation we are now ready to embark on our task.

Set for the Psalms

This book will attempt to provide a biblical theology of the Psalter following the principles explained above. It will show how the historical hope for the restoration of the Davidic

³ Cited in Scott Hahn, “Prima Scriptura,” *The Church and the Universal Catechism: Proceedings from the Fifteenth Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars*, Rev. Anthony Mastroeni, ed. (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1992), 91.

⁴ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 321.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Crisis in Catechesis” *Canadian Catholic Review*, 7 (1983): 178.

kingdom, as represented in the Psalter, was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. This kingdom was the means by which God would extend His covenant family bond to all men. In doing so God would restore man to the original calling that Adam received: divine sonship.

The book is divided into two parts. In Part I, we will first look at the Davidic covenant, seeing how it represents the climax of all of God's Old Testament promises. Then, we will examine Book of Psalms from a bird's-eye view, looking at the major themes represented in the Psalter. In the last section of Part I, we will take an in-depth look at the Psalter itself—a worm's eye view—looking at how the individual psalms and the subtle movement of the Psalter as a whole underscore the hope of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom.

Part II will show how Christ brings fulfillment to Israel's hopes. First, we will see how Christ restores the covenants that were partially fulfilled in the Davidic kingdom. Then, we will examine the kingdom as a central theme of Christ's earthly ministry. Finally, we will see how the Church constitutes the restoration of the kingdom through her sacramental life, especially the Eucharistic liturgy, and gathers all peoples and nations into God the Father's loving embrace.