

## Introduction

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Dum per quaedam densa et opaca cogor viam carpere.

—Augustinus, *De Trinitate*, 1.3.6

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“[A]s I am being forced to pick my way along some dense and obscure path”—these are the words of Augustine at the beginning of his ambitious project to explore the essential unity and the parallel threefold nature of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> Although the issue I wish to explore is much less complex than classical problems of trinitarian theology, the path I must take in order to approach it is no less dense or obscure. It is a path not easily discernible on the age-old map of theological reflection; it consists of several faint side-tracks and lines ending in what may seem as impasses. In order to verify and update, if necessary, an old map, one has no choice but go to the terrain of first-order reflection and check the original dimensions and particularities of the given theological landscape. Here one must be prepared to leave the beaten track at times or to make one’s way through long-untrodden paths where the ground needs to be cleared of the lush undergrowth of accumulated prejudice. One should also be aware of the fact that no country road runs in an absolutely straight line and so some twists and turns are a necessary concomitant of one’s intellectual journey.

So what is the path I set out to explore and what corrections do I want to make to the theological map? My main contention is that the theological

1. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1.3.6.

contours of human affectivity have not yet been adequately indicated on this map and, although it does contain discontinuous lines that eventually add up to a larger network, these lines have rarely been studied on their own and the distinctive shape they outline has hardly been identified yet. While current theology is consciously grappling with the consequences of Enlightenment rationalism and seems to be rather successful in identifying the theological contours of reason, it is much more ignorant of its own tradition concerning human emotionality and is therefore practically unequipped against the dangers of irrational sentimentalism, on the one hand, and an emotionally deficient rationalism, on the other. Such neglect affects the entire shape of the Christian stance towards faith, revelation, and the theology of love. As Michael Paul Gallagher has recently argued, a Christian vision of human affectivity is vital for our understanding of the human predicament and our relationship to God, since “[w]hat is at stake in Christian faith is not any generic openness to the absolute but a zone where incarnate affectivity recognizes and, overwhelmed by wonder, decides about the God whose justice fulfils our hopes. This is the core of Christian experience, as truth, as freedom and as a logic of affectivity.”<sup>2</sup> The missing “logic of affectivity” is likewise a major concern for Placide Deseille, who, in commenting on the regrettable disappearance from mainstream theological discourse of the theme of the biblical heart after the Enlightenment, observes that although the theology elaborated by pietism is eminently one based on the heart, it is nonetheless incapable of developing a “Christian logic of affectivity” on the basis of purely affective principles.<sup>3</sup>

And here we touch upon a crucial diagnosis put forward by various proponents of a theory concerning cultural history. They all voice the common conviction that reason and sensibility suffer from an unwholesome dissociation in our world, hence intellect and affectivity are in disharmony. The head and the heart are set in opposition and one usually opts for one at the expense of the other; the two are hardly ever considered as a unified whole and the interaction between them is not conceptualized. True, there are numerous attempts at the exploration of the passionate character of reason or the rationality of emotion. However, on the one hand, these accounts are typically written from a philosophical perspective and so they do not reckon in a systematic manner with the particularities of the Christian

2. Gallagher here interprets the theology of contemporary Italian theologian Pierangelo Sequeri, whose entire theological quest he sees as directed towards the recuperation of the affective dimension of faith and revelation. Gallagher, “Truth and Trust,” 24.

3. Deseille, “Ame-Coeur-Corps,” in Lacoste, *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie*, 30–31.

theological tradition; and, on the other hand, they mostly seek to overcome the dichotomy by leveling out differences between the two sides: either reason is integrated into a concept of emotion, or emotion is made an integral part of reason. The approach I wish to adopt is neither to opt for the heart over against reason, nor to turn the heart into a kind of alternative reason. My search for the traditional logic of Christian affectivity is designed to explore its distinguishing marks and its specific function; it works with the hypothesis of a median zone where affectivity and reason, love and logos coincide and, without losing their distinctive identities, interact in multiple mediations.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, I am convinced that the issue of human affectivity cannot be addressed on its own and in isolation, but needs to be treated in the wider context of anthropological reflection. Discourse on the emotions has traditionally been scattered throughout various fields of moral and dogmatic theology connected with problems such as the role of the passions in the attainment of virtues (ethics), the passions of Christ's soul (Christology), the role of the emotions in the beatific vision (eschatology), and the human disposition before and after the fall (protology). My account aims to pull together various strands of thought in an effort to outline the anthropological framework in which these seemingly disparate discourses have been embedded. Contrary to many current philosophical treatments, which consider the emotions on their own as isolated entities over against other functions of the mind, traditional theological reflection seems to have neglected the theme of the emotions, failing to devote special attention to it on its own. Such neglect, however, is only apparent since, in traditional accounts, the emotions are treated as part of a larger project, namely, theological anthropology (this is why Aquinas situates his distinctive treatment of the emotions before the discussion of virtues as a preliminary concerning the human constitution). The Christian framework for discourse on the emotions is not to be sought in separate treatises on this topic (as is the case in traditional philosophical accounts), but must be looked for within the context of theological anthropology; the study of the human condition with reference to God and creation, and reflection on the human person viewed in his relation to God, the Creator.

4. In an insightful philosophical study, William J. Wainwright examines the interaction between affectivity and reason and argues for the necessary presence of passional factors in reasoning, on the one hand, and, on the other, the necessary "critique of passional reason" since reason can be both hindered and aided by the emotional element. My approach differs from Wainwright's in that it seeks to explore the theological background to the Christian claim—acknowledged by Wainwright—that reason works well only if one's faculties are rightly disposed and also focuses on the specifically theological portrayal of human emotionality. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*.

The theological logic of affectivity coincides with a larger logic that views the human person as being created in the image of God, recreated through Christ's redemption, and destined to eschatological beatitude in the eternal life of the Triune God. The Christian logic of the emotions is at the same time hierarchical: it revolves around a magnetic centre, the root emotion of love, which organizes every other emotion according to its own logic and towards its own fulfillment. Love is seen as generating a host of positive emotions and, within the Christian framework, it is only these emotions that have a truly ontological status, negative emotions like pain, grief, or distress being regarded as merely deficient forms of unfulfilled love. Consequently, the emotions worthy of the ideal human state of happiness before the fall are thought to be ones connected with love: joy, hope, pleasure, and desire. These are also the ones that, it is hoped, await humans in the blessed state of ultimate beatitude. Finally, the Christian logic of affectivity envisages a polar tension between the sensible and the intellectual, the finite and the infinite, the bodily and the spiritual, internalizing in turn this same tension in a theological vision of love. On this logic, human affectivity is ordered towards likeness to God and eternal beatitude.

Therefore, my inquiry will revolve around three interrelated themes. First, it scrutinizes claims concerning the alleged rupture of intellect and sensibility in the human constitution. Next, it sets out to detect the theological contours of emotionality in the Christian tradition. Third, it approaches the issue of love from the perspective of theological anthropology and in the light of the findings of the two former quests. The first chapter situates the claim concerning the dichotomy of affectivity and reason within the broader context of cultural history, philosophy, and literature. Chapter 2 engages in a constructive dialogue with one specific philosophical anthropological account of the fragile and tensile unity of our human disposition. Paul Ricoeur's *Fallible Man* provides us with the lineaments of a systematic phenomenological framework for the conceptualization of the role of human affectivity and a sophisticated concept of the heart as the site of complex mediation between the vital and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite. The philosophy of *Fallible Man* offers ample food for thought for a theological-anthropological account of the human person who is ideally created in the state of innocence and historically is believed to have fallen and so to have lost such a state.

The conversation started in the philosophical mode is continued in the third and the fourth chapters as a theological quest along the lines of a theology of the image of God. In chapter three, a panoply of patristic authors—together with Thomas Aquinas as a key spokesman for the later

tradition—is interrogated on the question of the seat of the image in the human person.<sup>5</sup> Our dialogue with various voices from the theological tradition ends with a recent distinctive voice: in John Paul II's catecheses on conjugal love, a long process of image-theology receives a completely new expression and entirely renewed emphases with the inclusion of the body in the image of God. The fourth chapter revisits the tradition, enquiring about the place of emotionality with regard to the image within the framework of patristic reflection on the prelapsarian state of original innocence and the human predicament after the fall as it is spelt out along the lines of the biblical creation accounts. The general features of affectivity are gleaned from Thomas Aquinas's account of both human emotions and the specific passions of Christ's humanity. Here, the twofold nature of affectivity receives a forceful expression. This leads us to questions concerning the Christian version of the ancient philosophical ideal of detachment and related aspects of divine impassibility. Finally, the missing dimension of the biblical heart is summoned to enter into dialogue with Ricoeur's idea of mediation in an effort to bridge an ever-growing current gap between reason and affectivity.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the theme of love which emerges as the guiding principle of all Christian talk concerning emotionality. In this chapter the philosophical and the theological voices enter into a closer dialogue and their utterances alternate in a rapid sequence. The love of philosophy and the love of theology appear as identical and yet markedly different doublets. Concepts of love are haunted by the same dichotomy one registers with regard to the twofold nature of affectivity. Accordingly, recent accounts of love are recognized as fighting against a theoretical rupture between *erōs* and *agapē*, embodied love and spiritual charity. The body, which had been long left out of the image of God, had also been dispensed with in the understanding of intellectual love, which was regarded as alone worthy of participation in God's divine charity. What has suffered damage from such a dichotomist approach is the true emotionality of love in the intellectual mode. It is against this background that I turn to two—in many respects parallel—accounts of embodied erotic love in the sixth chapter, in the hope of finding the difference that the inclusion of the body makes for accounts of love and human affectivity. Jean-Luc Marion's embodied erotic phenomenon and John Paul II's theology of embodied love join in a last intriguing dialogue on the nature of unified one-way erotic love. Their differences

5. I read Aquinas as a "father of the church," whose position is not unquestionably normative, but whose ideas reveal an original and influential vision. See Otto Hermann Pesch's thoughtful classification of various current stances concerning the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Otto Hermann Pesch, "Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology," in Fergus Kerr, *Contemplating Aquinas*, 185–216.

reveal a basic disparity of vision due to their differing stances, but are also disclosive of the very ruptures inherently present in the philosophical/theological tradition they want to overcome. And this leads us back to the Ricoeurian heart and the symbolic heart of Scripture: love as a curious chimeric of age-old reflection might only be adequately grasped through the simultaneously emotional and reasonable prism of the heart. The Christian logic of affectivity should never dispense with a persuasive vision of the tender emotionality of love.

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