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God's Plea for Trust

Marcus Wobschall

University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, mawobs08@smumn.edu

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THE SAINT PAUL SEMINARY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
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God's Plea For Trust

A THESIS

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Master of Arts in Theology

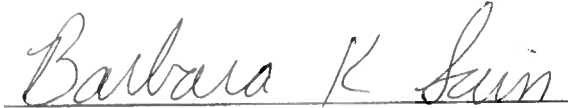
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This thesis by Marcus Wobschall fulfills the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts degree in Theology approved by Mark McInroy, Th.D., as Thesis Adviser, and by Barbara Sain, Ph.D. and by Anne King, Ph.D. as Readers.


Mark McInroy, Th.D., Thesis Adviser


Barbara Sain, Ph.D., Reader


Anne King, Ph.D., Reader

God's Plea for Trust

Part 1: Introduction

God is like a belayer. For those who choose to climb the mountain of sanctity, he gives freedom and slack to move about on their own¹. On this perilous climb, he also anchors us², eyes our progress³, and prevents accidental slips from causing us to lose all of our progress⁴. He undertakes the journey with us⁵, guides us⁶, and encourages us⁷. Underneath all of these different aspects, the relationship between the climber and the belayer is one marked by trust on the part of the climber. Once the climber begins his ascent, he is almost entirely at the mercy of the belayer to keep him anchored. Without the belayer, he is completely without support, guidance, or security. The experience taps into a natural human question: Should I trust another person? It also leads us to a decision point. We can either begin the journey and choose to trust another, or, never begin to climb and remain where there is comfort and familiarity.

This analogy, intended to highlight an aspect of our relationship to God, is admittedly weak and the reader would be wise not put the full weight of their confidence on it. Nonetheless, it still captures something about our relation to God. No analogy can perfectly capture the relationship between God and creature; however, my hope is that the

¹ Psalm 119:109; All Scripture is taken from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated

² Heb 6:19; The extensive Scripture footnotes are designed to orient the reader to specific passages for personal use and to emphasize its importance to this project.

³ Ps 139

⁴ Ps 56:13

⁵ Is 41:10

⁶ Ps 48:14

⁷ 2 Cor 1:4

reader will see in it some aspect of this relationship, as well as the significance of recognizing and responding to God's plea for our trust. In what follows will be a mixture of normative theological study intended to highlight God's incessant plea for trust throughout Revelation, as well as practical spiritual teaching intended to inspire the faithful to an interior life with Jesus Christ, or lead them to places of change, conversion, and greater maturity in Christ.

Therefore, the following 5 sections are designed to introduce the reader to the topic of trust as it is presented to us throughout Sacred Scripture. We will do this by first examining paradigmatic figures and episodes from both the Old and New Testaments, carefully observing what lessons we can draw from them. After this, we will look at trust as a virtue and attempt to mine out the implications of what trust means in a more practical and philosophical sense after having encountered it in these select Scriptural scenes. Having done this, we will then be able to examine in detail what common human experiences and interior attitudes create obstacles for trust and what remedies exist for them. Throughout this project, the thesis to be developed is a simple but important one: we will see that trusting God does not necessarily mean that everything will turn out wonderful in our lives, or even according to our desires or hopes. In fact, when one is submissive to God's providence and truly intent on being devoted to God, we will see that God's plan consistently involves suffering, adversity, and very frustrating experiences for us before we are ultimately delivered of them. This will be a theme throughout. Those who have lived lives of great trust have also lived lives of great suffering and personal frustration.

Part 2: The Plea of God

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled; you have faith in God, have faith also in me”*⁸

Throughout Revelation history, God has been pleading for man to trust in Him. He has done this through the lives of individuals like Noah⁹, Abraham¹⁰, and Moses¹¹, through the history of the entire nation of Israel, through prophets, and even through those who have been opposed to God¹². Throughout time, the people of God have wavered between holiness¹³ and sin¹⁴, faithfulness¹⁵ and unfaithfulness¹⁶, peace¹⁷ and anxiety¹⁸, joy¹⁹ and sorrow²⁰, discouragement²¹ and hope²². Despite this oscillation of mankind, God has not given up, and even until modern times, has sent new prophets of mercy to *anyone who has ears*²³ in order to enkindle trust in human hearts.

In our modern age of digital technology and higher education, we have instant access to huge amounts of information, even theological information that significantly aids our ability to study and understand Revelation. This is a great blessing from God for us. A problem arises when we, who rely on the advances of technology and the rapid

⁸ John 14:1

⁹ Gen 6:22; 7:5

¹⁰ Gen 15:6

¹¹ Num 14:11-19

¹² Is 44:28; 45:1

¹³ Lev 19: 1-2

¹⁴ Ex 32

¹⁵ Deut 5:22-27

¹⁶ 1 Sam 8:5

¹⁷ Num 6:26; 25:12;

¹⁸ Deut 1:26-33

¹⁹ Ex 18: 1-12

²⁰ Deut 26:6-7

²¹ Num 32:9

²² Ex 14-15; Lk 24:21

²³ Mark 4:9

increase of information, forget that God exhorts us to seek not only information, but also wisdom²⁴. Information is not synonymous with wisdom. Information includes uncorrelated bits of data, be it mathematics, biology, chemistry, or theology. We have no shortage of information in our world or even in theology. There is, however, a shortage of wisdom. Wisdom takes information and those discursive bits of data and, pervious to the influence of prayer and objective truth, streams them into truths and answers the deepest human questions. On this point, Deacon James Keating observes that:

“The theologian is called to turn “every movement toward possessiveness into an offering.” In this way the work of theology becomes porous to the influence of prayer and objective truth, rendering it less likely that our own ideas will harden into an ideology. Reason has a new beginning in faith. The mind is taken up and made new in the encounter with Christ in prayer. Now conversion is the new foundation for thinking²⁵.

Keating’s point is that “doing theology” must be intricately related to one’s personal conversion to Christ, and that one’s work should be a natural outcome from the encounter with Jesus. In this way, our ideas will be Christ’s ideas, and not, as Keating states, the outcome of some hardened human ideology. As we move forward and consider God’s plea for trust throughout Revelation, my hope is that our considerations will be truly porous to Divine Wisdom and honest theological study.

In the Sacred Scriptures. Our first consideration will revolve around a few Old Covenant figures who each exemplified trust in God through different circumstances in their lives, many of them without any example to follow themselves. Our theme is trust, and we will advance that theme by looking at select Old Testament and Gospel episodes. Each

²⁴ Proverbs 2:1-6

²⁵ Deacon James Keating, Ph.D. *Teaching Seminary Theology* published in *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*, Spring 2011

selection will take us further along this path, which is the intimate following of Jesus Christ, who leads us to the Father. The author Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis will be a guide for us on this journey. He encourages our study by asserting that one cannot truly respond to God's plea without being attentive and willing to persevere in listening, from the center of one's being, to what God communicates to each of us personally²⁶. On this point, Simone Weil, a French writer quoted in Merikakis's book, offers us some wonderful advice:

Attention consists in suspending one's thought, in making oneself available, empty, and penetrable to the object contemplated. The wealth of knowledge one has already acquired and is forced to use must, at the moment of contemplative attention, be kept nearby, close to one's present thinking, but at an inferior level. With regard to all particular thoughts one has already formed, attentive thinking must be like a man on top of a mountain looking out before him. He is aware of the forests and plains before him and below him, but he does not really look at them. Above all, attentive thought must be empty, in expectation, not searching for anything, but ready to receive in all its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it. All misunderstandings...all absurdities [in our efforts to express our view of the world] come from the fact that our thought has with too much haste jumped on something and has filled itself prematurely and thus is no longer available to receive the truth. The cause is always that one has wanted to be active; one has wanted to search...But the most precious goods must not be searched for; they must be waited for. Because man cannot find them by his own efforts, and if he goes out searching for them he will instead find false goods whose falsity he will not be able to discern²⁷.

²⁶ Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis *The Way of the Disciple*. Ignatius Press, 2003, p. 33

²⁷ This quote is taken from *The Way of the Disciple* page 33, but can be found in *Réflexions sur le bon usage des études scolaires en vue de l'Amour de Dieu*, in *Attente de Dieu*.

It is precisely this kind of attention we will strive for as we contemplate these densely packed Scriptural episodes. Before taking time to contemplate the Word of God, it is necessary that we acquire and maintain this prerequisite attitude for hearing and responding to God's earnest plea for faith and trust contained therein. Again, as we approach these Sacred Texts, we are seeking not only information and knowledge but, above all, Wisdom. We are seeking God and the power of His Word to transform us, to change us from our present state to new life in Christ.

The Old Testament

Abraham's Blind Faith. Any consideration of trust must surely look to Abraham²⁸ as a model because he is our father in faith. He is therefore our father in trust. What makes Abraham's faith especially meritorious in our eyes is the fact that he had no previous example to follow. The Old Testament acquires momentum from God's promises to Abraham and it continually moves forward to the fulfillment of these promises. There are three key episodes from the Abraham narratives to draw lessons of trust from. They are 1) the call of Abraham, 2) the promise of an heir, and 3) the command to sacrifice his son Isaac.

In Genesis 12, God initiates his relationship with Abraham after his name appears suddenly out of a long list of persons in Genesis 11. Seemingly out of nowhere, God calls Abraham to leave his land, his kindred, and his father's house to begin moving towards an unknown land. At the same time, God offers three promises to Abraham, and, somehow, Abraham is attuned enough to hear God's voice and is inspired to leave

²⁸ For the sake of consistency, we will use the name Abraham without reference to his name change

everything behind, embracing his new mission. Like Jesus's call of the disciples, who leave their nets to follow Christ, God accompanies his call with a persuasive reason why the call should be followed. God says: "Follow me, and I will do *this* for you," or "follow me for *this* reason. Look, I will make you fishers of men," or, "look, I will make your name great and give you many descendants." Among the promises God makes to Abraham are: 1) land²⁹ (Canaan), 2) royal dynasty³⁰, and 3) a worldwide blessing³¹. Not only are these promises, but each of these are solemnly raised to the status of a covenant. Abraham is a model of trust not only because of his total act of faith in his new God, but because his story is the first example of what God's divine initiative looks like in the life of an individual.

2. The Call of Abraham.

Now the Lord said to Abraham, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'³²

In order to comprehend the total act of faith and trust on the part of Abraham, we need only consider some of the common challenges that any immigrant faces when he or she moves to a foreign land. Abraham himself is identified as a stranger and alien among the

²⁹ Genesis 15

³⁰ Genesis 17

³¹ Genesis 22

³² Genesis 12:1-3

people of Canaan³³. His new identity as an immigrant/stranger/foreigner directly reflects his new mission to trust God, who has asked him to leave the security he once had. Abraham is now exposed to culture shock, social displacement, cultural confusion, and probably language barriers. Above all else, he has presumably undergone some kind of radical religious conversion, even though the biblical text offers us virtually no contextual information about Abraham before his call in Gen 12. Whatever traditional religion Abraham had previously followed, he even left that behind, making a clean break from his idolatrous past in obedience to God. His decision to leave his father's house means that he transferred the well being and survival of his entire household to his new God³⁴. Jonathan Magonet, a Jewish rabbi and theological scholar, insightfully writes:

When God first calls Abraham, He says, '*lekh I'kha,*' go away from your land, your kinsfolk and your father's house. A moment's thought will make us realize that these instructions are not a matter of geography - you cannot leave your land without first leaving behind your kinsfolk and without leaving your father's house prior to that. The sequence has to do with increasingly harder emotional decisions - from your land, from the family in which you grew up, your culture and society, to the house of your father, the strongest, most emotional tie that a person has. All of these he is asked to give up to follow a mysterious God³⁵.

At some point, Abraham heard, he conceived, the Word of God, and it dramatically changed him in the very center of who he was. He left his homeland with nothing but a promise to orient his journey. Abraham does not know what is happening or where is he going or even why he is going there. He only knows, and has decided that, obeying God

³³ Gen 23:4

³⁴ Magonet's quote is found in: Gallagher, Sarita D. "*Blessing on the Move: The Outpouring of God's Blessing through the Migrant Abraham.*" *Mission Studies: Journal Of The International Association For Mission Studies* 30, no. 2: 147-161, 2013.

³⁵ *ibid*

is a good idea even though he does not understand God's underlying motives for choosing him. Somehow, he has been inspired enough to sacrifice his own comfort and embrace the destiny God has marked out for him. He must walk in naked faith, following a God he cannot see but who clearly exudes a mysterious aura of authority and concern over Abraham.

2. *The Promise of an Heir.* Our next episode in the life of Abraham moves us from the more general to the particular. We now move from God's call of Abraham to a specific path that he must tread in order to live out God's generous invitation. Abraham stands out among all other biblical figures as our father in faith with his election and theophany in Genesis 12. The revelation of God is described briefly and involves promises that obviously had force in Abraham's heart, since he was 75 years old³⁶ when he began his new journey with God. Among the promises outlined earlier, that of an heir, an offspring, seems to capture Abraham's heart in particular because, as we will see, he and his wife Sarah seem to fret more about this than anything else. In addition, God reiterates the promise at least 5 times after chapter 12:

1) The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him..."for all the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if you can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted³⁷."

³⁶ Gen 12:4

³⁷ Gen 13:14-16

2) He brought him outside and said, “Look towards the heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be³⁸.’

3) On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land...³⁹’

4) ‘I will make you exceedingly fruitful...I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout all generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you⁴⁰.’

5) ‘I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies⁴¹.’

God clearly says that Abraham will have offspring and that they will be numerous.

This promise takes on a double meaning, as does Abraham’s act of trust in God. Not only does Abraham trust God to fulfill his promise to give him children, but there is also a spiritual dimension that refers to the Jewish people who wait in expectation for the coming Messiah. It is they who, believing in the Messiah, will receive status as “descendants of Abraham⁴².” This waiting is a waiting in faith and trust for God to bring to fulfillment what was begun in Abraham. Having grown impatient with God’s timing, he and Sarah chose to have a surrogate child through Hagar in ch. 16. Abraham’s faith

³⁸ Gen 15:5

³⁹ Gen 15:18

⁴⁰ Gen 17:6-7

⁴¹ Gen 22:17-18

⁴² See Heb 2:16 and Galatians 3:29; “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

continued to be stretched as time went by⁴³ and he continued to remain childless. During this time, Abraham experienced temptation that Ishmael would be his heir rather than he and Sarah's child, despite God's promise to the contrary⁴⁴. God even tells Abraham what name his son will wear⁴⁵. The power of this story in contributing to our theme of trust derives in large part from the contrast and utter perplexity between Sarah and Abraham, who find it puzzling that God could grant a child to them in their old age, in such extreme circumstances.

4. *The Command to Sacrifice Isaac.* This command strikes us as one of the most bewildering in all of Sacred Scripture:

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you⁴⁶.'

This request seems so disturbing that it makes even the most faithful and devout persons question what such a demand suggests about our God. Beyond this, the emotional anguish is driven home by God's incessant and tender reference to Isaac as Abraham's "son, his only son, whom he loves." Abraham's obedience is even more bewildering in virtue of the fact that he who once bargained with God to spare the wicked Sodom and Gomorrah now does not so much as question God's command. He does not attempt to bargain away God's request in order to spare his beloved son. Although one could read this narrative and conclude that God's ways are cruel and unpredictable, there is an inner

⁴³ At least 10 years of waiting for God to fulfill his promise. See Gen 16:3

⁴⁴ Gen 15: 2-4

⁴⁵ Gen 17:21

⁴⁶ Gen 22:1-2

logic that appears when the episode is read in context with what comes before and after. Jeff Cavins, a noteworthy Catholic evangelist and biblical scholar, suggests that God's command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac begins with a connection to the story of Hagar and Ishmael in the preceding chapter. He invites us to see the stories side by side in order to understand their constitutive relationship to each other⁴⁷. God's command to sacrifice Isaac is a just result of Abraham's decision to send Hagar and Ishmael on a death march into the wilderness without sufficient supplies. The agonizing request God makes to Abraham in 22:2 is meant to make him feel the sting of his guilt for sending his son to his death. Abraham, our father is faith and trust, obeys God despite the difficulty he is now faced with. God tells Abraham to offer Isaac as a "burnt offering," a sacrifice understood for atonement⁴⁸. The suggestion here is that Abraham's act of sending Ishmael into exile now required atonement. Cavins's evaluation of this text is compatible with our theme of trust because it shows us that trust means not only accepting God's action when it fits in with our personal desires and hopes, but accepting it with equal enthusiasm when God needs to punish us and purify our hearts of wickedness and wrongdoing. Allowing ourselves to be punished by God also requires trust.

All of these events underscore the unshakable trust Abraham placed in God, because even when he had to suffer and face God's justice, he still obeyed. Trust is never more authentic than when one submits in obedience and faith to God's ways even when it seems to bewilder us. We mentioned at the beginning that our theme would be trust and that trust necessarily implies suffering and the vexation of our desires. Here, then, we can

⁴⁷ Cavins, Jeff and Gray, Tim. *Walking with God: A Journey through the Bible*. Ascension Press, 2010, 43-45

⁴⁸ Lev 1:4

see a good first example of the fact that a life of trust in God usually includes a heavy dose of personal difficulties and sufferings.

5. Tobit, Job, and Deuteronomic Theology.

What is Deuteronomic Theology? Ever since ancient times there have been scientific questions about the origins and material in the Sacred Scriptures. Consider, for example, Origen's Hexapla, an immense project that compared word-for-word the Septuagint and Hebrew texts of Scripture. One of his earliest writings, he placed six different versions in parallel columns to examine textual variants. This is just one example. If we fast forward to more modern times, Richard Simon, a 17th century French theologian and biblical scholar, made a name for himself by writing the book *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, in which he rejected the widely held belief that Moses was the single author of the Pentateuch. Simon's new declaration was based in part on the fact that several biblical books, particularly in the Pentateuch, were full of repetitions and other stylistic differences. For example, how could Moses be the single author of the Pentateuch if Genesis 34 describes the episode of Moses's death? Simon was certainly not the first to notice such details in the Scriptures, but his work seems to be responsible for setting off a firestorm for future biblical criticism. Now fast-forwarding to our contemporary times, the prevailing theory among most biblical scholars is the Documentary Hypothesis, a theory that tries to rectify the inconsistencies in Scripture by asserting that the Pentateuch indeed was not written by one person in one place, and furthermore, that the authors of the Pentateuch had sources that they were drawing from. Scholars identify four different sources. One of them is the Deuteronomist source. This is the source we are going to focus on. The unique style of the Deuteronomist source sets it apart from the other three

because it generally contains longer speeches and sermons, such as those found in the book of Deuteronomy. There are other characteristics that will be discussed further below.

Let us now turn our attention specifically towards its relation to our theme of trust in the books of Tobit and Job. German scholar Martin Noth is usually credited with the theory known as the “Deuteronomic History” which notes that the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings all sound like the Book of Deuteronomy in terms of language and style. Most scholars will agree with his observation that there is a connection between these books since they share a lot of common elements. There are four main elements that mark Deuteronomic theology:

- **Free will** — free choice is at a high premium in Deuteronomic language. Whatever good or evil comes into your life is a result of your own decision to obey God.
 - Gen 30: 15 “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.”
- **Conditional Statements** — “if...then” statements. Deuteronomic theology emphasizes reward or retribution based on one’s observance of the Covenant.
 - Gen 30: 16 “If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today...then you shall live
- **Loving God** — Deuteronomic theology is also distinct from other sources because it has more emphasis on loving God. This does not mean other Biblical sources do not include this, but sources rooted in DT tend to manifest a greater emphasis. Other books in the Pentateuch emphasize God’s love (*hesed*) for man, but DT depicts a viewpoint where man must, in turn, love God.

- Deut 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...”
- Deut 10:2 “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to love him...”
- **Land** — The promised land is God’s gift to Israel. Land = blessing / exile = curse. We see the theme of “the land” God promises emphasized in Deuteronomistic theology as well.
 - Deut 8:1 “This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.”

The elements of free will and consequences will come to play a special role in our considerations because we will see them at play in Job and Tobit. In all truthfulness, many of us would make great Old Testament Jews because many of us live our spiritual lives according to the conventional wisdom contained in these Deuteronomistic principles. Many of us think: “If I do what is good, I should expect good things to happen to me and receive blessings from God.” As we see from our lived experiences, this is often not the case at all. It was, however, the prevailing mindset at the time. The favor of God was to be known to his people by how well they keep the Covenant. We will now see this theology played out in the book of Job and also why it has relevance to the advancement of this thesis.

6. Job. The whole point of the book of Job is to address the question of why righteous people suffer. If, as Deuteronomistic theology attests, God always looks after the righteous and always punishes the wicked, why does the opposite seem to be our lived experience?

Evil people prosper while the just struggle to get ahead. The Book of Job develops this drama from the dialogue between Job and his three friends, who all assume (as good Old Testament Israelites), that Job's suffering must be the result of evil-doing. As we will see, this is not the case at all. For this reason, some see the Book of Job as a refutation of Deuteronomic theology (even though there is a resurgence of it at the end when God repays Job for his righteousness). Job was completely divested of those things which men tend to lean on to keep their spirits high (health, family, good friends). Being stripped of these things revealed Job's naked spirit. Bishop Fulton Sheen, commenting on Job's experience, notes that Job was left with only 2 things: himself and God⁴⁹. Out of his suffering, Job begins to ask questions: *Why did I not die at birth⁵⁰? What is my end, that I should be patient⁵¹? Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the schemes of the wicked⁵²? Why did you bring me forth from the womb⁵³? Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy⁵⁴? Why should I not be impatient⁵⁵?* Over the course of chapters 4-31, Job's three friends take on the role of explaining to Job why such suffering has befallen him. Among many others, St. Thomas Aquinas highlights the following reasons⁵⁶:

- 1) Only the blameworthy are punished (4:8)
- 2) Divine punishment is inevitable (15:14-16)

⁴⁹ Reflection on Job by Fulton J. Sheen. *The Catholic Hour. Peace: Trust in God's Plan*. March 15, 1942, audio available at https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=peace+trust+in+gods+plan

⁵⁰ Job 3: 11

⁵¹ Job 6:11

⁵² Job 10:3

⁵³ Job 10:18

⁵⁴ Job 13: 24

⁵⁵ Job 21:4

⁵⁶ *Cantena Aurea*, St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Book of Job available through the Dominican House of Studies at <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/>

3) Job is presumptuous because he believes he is righteous and because he argues with God (22:4-11)

The main point of bringing out the arguments of Job's friends is to help highlight the attitude of the Deuteronomic theology we described. It requires Israel to live under God's law and explains Job's afflictions with reference to his moral state. Under the Covenant given, God made promises to Israel, particularly for the land of Canaan, but this promise is conditional: If the Israelites are unfaithful, they will lose the blessing. But if they are faithful, they can expect God to fulfill his promise. It explains successes and failures with due reference to one's faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God. The Book of Job seems to blow the lid off of this prevailing wisdom. This is probably why, towards the end of the book, Job's three friends give up trying to give answers for Job. He seemed to be righteous, yet he was suffering⁵⁷. It did not make sense to them. Then at chapter 32, Elihu appears as an arrogant intellectual. He too rambles on and on about why Job suffers. God waits until he finishes his professorial lecture, and, in chapter 38, immediately dismisses Elihu's lofty words: "*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge*⁵⁸?"

Aquinas comments:

After the discussion of Job and his friends about divine providence took place, Elihu had assumed to himself the office of determining the answer, contradicting Job in some things and his friends in others. But because human wisdom is not sufficient to understand the truth of divine providence, it was necessary that this dispute should be determined by divine authority⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ Job 32:1 "*So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes*"

⁵⁸ Job 38:2

⁵⁹ *Cantena Aurea*, St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Book of Job

Aquinas points out that God surprisingly does not respond to any of Job's complaints or Elihu's words. Rather than answer Job and his friends' questions about suffering and providence, God begins to question Job without any reference to his sufferings: *Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding*⁶⁰ *...Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep*⁶¹ *?...Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high*⁶²? Sheen interprets this as God telling Job that unless he can understand the answers to these unfathomable questions, he could never understand the answer to his personal problems⁶³. And, as unsatisfactory as it may sound, Job submits to the fact that God does whatever He wills, and it is not for him to anxiously probe into God's unfathomable providence. The Church Fathers, on another note, tend to interpret this in a moral sense. That is to say, God expects humility from human beings. As an expression of this humility, Job, even though afflicted with the loss of friends, wealth, and children, still praised God for allowing such pains to befall him. Again, in line with our thesis, we see how trusting God can involve a great amount of suffering. We will see this theme continue with Tobit.

7. Tobit. The Book of Tobit paints him as a man very similar to Job. They both demonstrate faithfulness to God in spite of the sufferings that befell them. Tobit, in fact, suffered mockery, persecution, and poverty⁶⁴ precisely as a result of his care in observing the Torah. Yet, he remains in a posture of faith and trust despite the financial and social

⁶⁰ Job 38:4

⁶¹ Job 38:16

⁶² Job 39:27

⁶³ Fulton J. Sheen. *The Catholic Hour. Peace: Trust in God's Plan*. March 15, 1942, audio.

⁶⁴ Tobit 1:20

reversals he met with. Tobit's sufferings were so hard to bear, he and his wife Sarah prayed for death⁶⁵. While the central movement of the Book of Tobit deals with his son Tobias, Tobit's devotedness to God becomes all the more evident when his life is examined in light of the society that he lived in. The Book of Tobit will greatly contribute to our theme of trust through such an examination.

Tobit lived in the time period following the capture of Samaria by the Assyrian Empire in the 8th century BC. After the fall of Samaria, Israelites were deported to Assyria, as recorded in the second Book of Kings 17:5-6⁶⁶:

“Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.”

Cavins, in his book, puts forth the assertion that Assyrian records show King Sargon II had displaced 27,290 Israelites to these and other places⁶⁷. The Assyrians would strategically relocate and isolate tribes or nations that they defeated in order to quell the chance of any further insurgencies and rebellions. Tobit was among those who had been exiled to the foreign land of Nineveh with the rest of his tribe. Besides the fact that Tobit had been displaced to a foreign land, there was widespread apostasy throughout his entire tribe⁶⁸. Tobit was a witness to the fact that, despite such widespread harlotry among the Israelites, there were small pockets or remnants of Israelites who remained faithful to God. Despite the unfaithfulness of Tobit's Israelite brothers and sisters, he went alone to

⁶⁵ Tobit 3:6; 3:10

⁶⁶ Also affirmed in Tobit 1:2

⁶⁷ Cavins, Jeff and Gray, Tim. *Walking with God: A Journey through the Bible*. Ascension Press, 2010, 191

⁶⁸ Tobit 1:3-6

Jerusalem for the festivals (1:6), remained faithful to the dietary laws (1:11), and showed great love of God through the exercise of mercy and charity to his fellow man (1: 6-8, 12). The Book of Tobit underscores the value of prayer, almsgiving, and firm trust in God's faithfulness, even when everything seems to be going wrong.

8. *Job and Tobit.* Job and Tobit are two different men who, in different circumstances, were constrained to do one of two things: abandon God because of the reversal of worldly fortune that befell them, or, trust God. Both men experienced great disappointments and reversals, and, both even wished for death to relieve them. Despite their exposure to seemingly unfair circumstances, they persevered in their lives of righteous conduct, following the guidance of Providence step by step, truly living by their naked faith alone amidst the confusion and suffering of their lives. The irony of these episodes is that the very lapses of fortune and darkness they endured only served to make them more faithful, more righteous, and more trusting. Their merit and spiritual perfection was ironed out through their experiences of suffering and misfortune.

Let us now take what we have analyzed and synthesize it once again. We spoke of Deuteronomic theology and its specific elements of free will and consequences in their relation to the Books of Job and Tobit. There is a special significance as to why Deuteronomic theology was analyzed. It contains principles and assumptions held by many Christians today: *"If I do what is right, I should expect good things to happen to me."* If this theological agenda becomes the main thrust of one's relationship with God, life can become very disorienting and confusing. It is not my intention to subvert Deuteronomy's message, but rather to highlight some theological elements that can cause problems in the spiritual lives of Christians if they are not understood and applied

carefully. God's action is not restricted to the theological agenda of Deuteronomic theology or any other kind of conventional wisdom. We cannot live our spiritual lives purely according to a theology of retribution.

Both Tobit and Job used their free will to choose trust⁶⁹ in God despite the fact that their life experiences were not reflecting the prevailing wisdom that God always blesses the just and always punishes evil-doers. This painful and contradictory experience is central to our thesis. But how should we read these books in light of the Deuteronomic theology we discussed? Are they meant to refute it? Subvert its message? How can we tolerate what seems like glaring inconsistencies between God's Word and our lived experience? He says that He always blesses the just and always punishes the wicked, yet, we are forced to confront the reality of our lived experience as not reflective of this. Or, is it that God's Word is true and we mis-apply its message? Do we need to set up an alternative to Deuteronomic theology? Perhaps one answer we can provide to all this is to highlight the fact that the Deuteronomic History was completed at a time when Israel was in exile, and the Israelites were unsure of what God was going to do. It was an attempt to explain in part why the kingdom had "failed" and God's people were exiled despite God's covenant promises. It was a time for Israel to reflect again on its beliefs and develop a deeper and more nuanced, more spiritual, view of God's action in the world and in their personal lives. Lawrence Boadt, an American Catholic priest and biblical

⁶⁹ Tobit 4; Job 2:9-10

scholar, suggests that as the Israelites had harshly experienced, God is not bound to a special land or king, but rather, he wants voluntary loyalty from his people⁷⁰.

The New Testament

Before we jump into the next episodes for consideration, we should pause to reflect on how we are approaching these texts in which we seek the meaning of God's plea for trust. In what has been considered so far, we have been introduced to three biblical figures who all exercised heroic faith and trust through some of the most difficult and frustrating human situations. It is also not insignificant that we have chosen to focus on three specific individuals from different time periods and different circumstances. Each of these men were, at some point, so interiorly transformed and firmly anchored in trust of God's goodness, that even when it seemed every trace of God had disappeared, they trusted Him. Paraphrasing C.S. Lewis, their circumstances constrained them to look out upon a universe from which every trace of Him seemed to have vanished, and, although no longer desiring, still intended to do God's will⁷¹. My hope is that this can awaken our hearts to the fact that God is not interested in faceless crowds or mindless worship, but in needy individuals. In the words of Merikakis, God took these individuals and formed each of them personally, with his own hands, and, as we might say, according to His heart. Every human being, if honest, should be able to see in himself or herself an individual needy to encounter God's goodness, and therefore, hear the plea of God for trust and faithfulness even in the midst of life's greatest storms. Let us now turn to the Gospels. After all, nowhere is marriage of trust and suffering more manifest than in the

⁷⁰ Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, Paulist Press: 2012, pg 333

⁷¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*. HarperOne, 1942, p. 40.

life of Jesus.

1. *The Storm on the Sea*⁷². We can now begin our contemplation of trust more fully in this episode of Mark's Gospel, as Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis puts it, "gladly submitting ourselves to what Jesus wants to teach us by his words and his presence"⁷³. The story in Mark provides a good segue from our Old Testament considerations because it is a more stripped down form than Matthew and Luke's account, bringing out theological overtones from the Old Testament. In *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, it is noted that:

"Here, and especially in the Pss, the sea is the location of destructive powers which are restrained only through the power of God (Jb 7:12; Ps 74 (73):13; 89 (88): 9-10). Calming of storm on the sea is one of the major proofs of God's love in Ps 107 (106):23-30. But here it is Jesus who plays the part attributed in the OT to God. There may also be further dimensions to the symbolic value of the scene: salvation from the evil powers is frequently described in the OT as freeing from deep waters (Jb 22:10-11; Ps 18 (17):4; 69 (68):1-2. Perhaps Jesus's sleep and the call to him to awake recall similar prayers to God: Ps 44 (43): 23-24; 35 (34): 23⁷⁴."

This whole episode draws nearly all of its power and drama from the very first line of the scene where Jesus said, "*Let us pass over to the other side.*" This sentence is easy to gloss over as a minor contextual detail. However, we should be careful to note that nothing is minor or superfluous in the Gospel. This sentence sums up the whole story, since it tells us exactly what will happen and what to expect. Jesus and the disciples are going to get into a boat and cross to the other side of the lake. He admittedly says nothing

⁷² Mark 4:35

⁷³ Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. *The Way of the Disciple*. Ignatius, 2003, p. 74

⁷⁴ *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, LTD, 1975, page 963

about a storm, but nonetheless, Jesus told his disciples that they *would* reach the other side. He did not say that “there might be a big storm and we could drown, so be vigilant and wake me up if anything happens.” This dramatic episode allows even us, who experience his presence differently than the disciples, to undertake a further step in the process of trust. As disciples today, we must remember to never avert our attention from Jesus, to always direct it to even the smallest detail of his conduct, words, gestures, and silences in the Gospel text, always looking for the intentions of His heart, trying to discover what he wants and wishes to teach us for the world’s salvation⁷⁵. The disciples, some of them being career fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, would assumingly have been familiar and somewhat comfortable with the sudden storms of wind that arose on the lake. It leads one to wonder how this storm was any different from others they likely experienced over the course of their lives. The Gospel text tells us that it was a “great storm of wind (v. 37),” leading us to believe that it was a more intense and dangerous storm than usual. Regardless, Jesus sleeps. He, who is “*the image of the invisible God...the first born of all creation...in whom all things were created... in whom all things are held together...and in whom the fullness of God dwells*⁷⁶”, is asleep. How humiliating of our God to sleep, to experience tiredness! What a complete kenosis that our God would condescend himself so much as to experience weariness, and furthermore, as *Dei Verbum* points out, to condescend himself as the Word of God into the text of the Gospel, likening himself to our human language⁷⁷. By sleeping, He permits the disciples to be in danger, to bear temptation, to experience fear, but also to impress upon them a

⁷⁵ Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. *The Way of the Disciple*. Ignatius, 2003, p. 71

⁷⁶ Colossians 1:16-19

⁷⁷ *Dei Verbum* §13

greater sense of the miracle which was to be performed⁷⁸, and moreover, a greater sense of their lack of trust. Even as the journey was beginning and the ship pulled away from port, the disciples had a strike against them because they did not take Jesus at his word that they would indeed “cross to the other side” as He had declared. The second strike against the disciples happened as they panicked outrageously in spite of the fact that Jesus was right next to them. Having become accustomed to Jesus working wonders for so many others, they were perhaps numb to the reality that the same Jesus was with them, believing he was God when awake, but asleep, only a man⁷⁹. By sleeping and appearing indifferent, Jesus allows time for the disciples to experience fear. Had He been awake, they may never have feared or felt the need to ask Him for help. Therefore it follows, “But he was in the stern, asleep on a cushion (v. 38).” Jesus’s subsequent rebuke of the disciples for their lack of faith constitutes the main thrust of our treatment of God’s plea for trust in this episode. The rebuke highlights the complete failure of the disciples in understanding who Jesus is. Throughout the first 4 chapters of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has been constantly working wonders⁸⁰. The Gospel of Mark contains very little actual teaching content of Jesus. It is action-oriented, as Jesus continually confronts demons and heals people. This places the episode on the lake in stark contrast to what has just been described, and the disciples are made to look fecklessly inept. The rebuke of Jesus is a strong one: “*Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*” Jesus often rebukes people for different reasons. Take, for example, the rebuke of the Syrophenician woman which

⁷⁸ *Cantena Aurea*, Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on Mark

⁷⁹ *Cantena Aurea*, Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on Mark

⁸⁰ Mark 1:29; 1:40; 2:1; 3:3-7

served to stimulate her faith⁸¹. This rebuke is different. It is directed right at the disciples and is a very serious criticism. His expectations are high and he gives a hard critique⁸² for not understanding the mission and not grasping Jesus's identity. It would perhaps have been a little consolation for Jesus to say "why do you have such little faith?" because it would portend that the disciples had *some* faith. Jesus rebukes them for having no faith whatsoever. This is very bad and Jesus appears angry and annoyed. It elicits images from the episode in Mark 3:5 when Jesus was angry at the hardness of hearts of those in the synagogue. This was not a good showing for the disciples and likely a quiet ride the rest of the way to shore.

2. *Jesus Addresses Anxiety: Matthew 6 and Luke 12.* Let us continue to pursue the theme of trusting God in the next episode, which is contained in both St. Matthew and St. Luke's Gospel. In the previous scene, we saw Jesus the wonder-worker. In what follows, we will see Jesus the divine teacher and mentor. As we begin, let us draw inspiration from St. Cyril of Alexandria who gives a brief synopsis of the text at hand:

Blessed therefore are we, in that we are taught by Himself His good and saving will, by which we are guided into all virtuous pursuits, that having so fulfilled a life worthy of emulation, such as befits the elect, we may reign with Him...Observe therefore how carefully, and with what great skill He fashions the lives of the holy apostles unto spiritual excellence. But with them He benefits us also: for He wills that all mankind should be saved, and should choose the wise and more excellent life. For this reason He makes them abandon superfluous anxiety, and does not permit them to practice a careworn and urgent

⁸¹ Mark 7:24

⁸² Mark's Gospel is noted for having a strong, critical assessment of the disciples/apostles. See as examples 4:13; 4:40; 6:52; 8:4; 8:17; 8:33; 9:18; 9:32-33; 10:35-44; 14: 66-72; 16:11

industry through the wish of gathering what exceeds their necessities; for in these matters a superfluity adds nothing to our benefit. "Be not anxious therefore, He says, for your life, what you shall eat: nor for your body, what you shall put on. For the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment." He did not simply say, "Be not anxious;" but added "for your life:" that is, do not expend any careful study on these things, but bestow your earnestness on things of far higher importance. For the life indeed is of more importance than food, and the body than raiment. Since therefore a risk is laid upon us that concerns both life and body, and pain and punishment are decreed against those who will not live uprightly, let all anxiety be laid aside respecting raiment and food.⁸³

Merikakis observes that we can find a certain irony in the fact that Jesus, the great wonder-worker we have encountered, is Great, Powerful, and Wise precisely through his identity as Son. Having nothing of his own, He receives everything from his Father and does nothing except what He sees the Father doing. He is in an eternal posture of reception. He insightfully expresses this as the "rich poverty" of Jesus Christ, who never forgets who His Father is and that He Himself is always Son, and therefore continually filled with life and glory by the Father⁸⁴. This advice of our Savior to abandon anxiety follows on the heels of his parable about the Rich Fool, a parable that could sum up Luke's whole Gospel. Luke comes forward very strongly on the point about surplus possessions, and presents Jesus as taking a very tough angle regarding them⁸⁵. Jesus wishes to teach us that the Father is worthy to be trusted and that He clearly promises to give us the necessities of life. He is pleading for trust and goes to lengths in order to cast

⁸³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke, Sermons 89-98* (Luke 12:13-13:9). Sermon XC, accessed at http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cyril_on_luke_09_sermons_89_98.htm

⁸⁴ Merikakis, *The Way of the Disciple*, pg. 44

⁸⁵ See as examples 9:3, 12:13, 16:10-13, 16:14, 18:18-25

away any doubt remaining in the hearts of his dear children:

- “Do not be anxious about your life”
- “Consider the ravens...”
- “Consider the lilies...”
- “Your Father knows what you need”
- “...it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”

There is a great paradox between Jesus and us in that He, who is eternally receptive as Son, receives everything and we, who “are merely human, are usually too full of our own ideas, projects, desires, anxieties, and prejudices to be able to receive anything⁸⁶” from God. He advises us to cast away worldly desires, and take delight in those things which please God. Our Lord begins by exhorting His listeners not to be “anxious” about their lives. That means, Cyril says, not to expend undue earnestness on things of lower importance, forgetting those of eternal importance. It would be a base thing, he continues, for one who strives after manly virtues to be intoxicated with fine apparel and expensive banquets. One may come away thinking this is all well, but how are we able to live if we cast our attention away from those things we need for daily living? It seems that this itself could cause us even more anxiety. As mentioned above, Luke presents Jesus as coming down hard on those who have *surplus* possessions. This is not because Jesus is anti-capitalist or anti-money, as some would love to assert. Jesus knows our human nature perfectly and wants to spare us, as Chrysostom notes, from the mischief of covetousness⁸⁷. Thus He does not merely say “do not worry,” but he also enjoins *reasons*. Not only does Jesus tell us what is true, but He also tells us in a persuasive manner. The hurt we receive does not primarily reside in these worldly objects

⁸⁶ Merikakis, *The Way of the Disciple*, pg. 45

⁸⁷ Homily 21 on Matthew, *St John Chrysostom* available at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>

we seek, but in something much more vital — it casts us out from God’s loving Providence, Who made us, loves us, and cares for us as a Father his child⁸⁸. By saying “do not worry,” He is not exhorting us to Quietism, nor to abandon working, but only not to rack ourselves with worry. Therefore He says, “do not worry,” but not, “do not work.”

Our Lord, masterful Teacher that He is, does not finish His lesson without giving reasons why His words should be heeded. Knowing full well the weakness and callousness of human minds and hearts, he continues his lesson with further explanations. He first invites His listeners to “consider the ravens.” He uses simple imagery and hyperbole to communicate His message on a 2nd grade level. Chrysostom notes that Jesus used such imagery as irrational fowl in order to bring forward his illustration more powerfully and cut to the heart of His hearers⁸⁹. The disciples, and therefore most of us, are not even like dumb birds, since they rely on God’s hand to provide the necessities without the toil of worry. Thus the Psalmist declares, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing⁹⁰.” Yet, our Lord concludes his first argument by assuring us that our value in His eyes far exceeds that of any bird, thereby expressing His deep plea that we trust his words: “...and yet your heavenly Father feeds them [the birds]...Are you not of much more value than they?” Jesus is pleading for trust! As if this reason were not enough, our Lord continues, offering another argument to convince our hearts to trust God. He continues, “And why do you worry about clothing?” moving into another hyperbolic statement about flowers and lilies of the field. “Do you see everywhere how

⁸⁸ *ibid*, §3

⁸⁹ *ibid*, §4

⁹⁰ Psalm 145: 15-16

He abounds in amplifications and intensities?” asks St. John Chrysostom. Jesus passes on to point out the utter stupidity of worrying about something such as clothing, when God is lavishly generous in clothing the flowers of the field with elegance. If a bird bears no comparison to God’s love for man, how much less does a silly flower? Yet, God decks out the flowers with great beauty and sophistication. To show how meaningless such flowers are, as He continues His discourse, He does not even refer to them as “lilies” anymore, but as “the grass of the field,” and later, “which is alive today and tomorrow thrown into the oven.” Again our Lord sums up his argument with words of tender consolation for us: “...will he not much more clothe you — you?” This word, “you” has much emphasis. The force of the word “you” clearly indicates, Chrysostom says, the great value God sets upon us and the personal concern that He takes over us⁹¹.

Let us not stop here but continue to mark the tender concern of God for his creatures. He continues with even further pleas: “Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” Over and over, our Lord attempts to persuade us by telling us that the Father knows what we need. In order to conclude our reflection, we will close with an insight from St. John Chrysostom once again:

Thus when He had set the soul free from anxiety, then He made mention also of Heaven. For indeed He came to do away with the old things, and to call us to a greater country. Therefore He does all, to deliver us from things unnecessary, and from our affection for the earth. For this cause He mentioned the heathens also, saying that “*the Gentiles seek after these things;*” they whose whole labor is for the present life, who have no regard for the things to come, nor any thought of Heaven. But to you not these present are the chief things, but other than these. For we were not born for this end, that

⁹¹ Homily 22 on Matthew, *St. John Chrysostom* available at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>

we should eat and drink and be clothed, but that we might please God, and attain unto the good things to come. Therefore as things here are secondary in our labor, so also in our prayers let them be secondary. Therefore He also said, “*Seek the kingdom of Heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you.*”...And He said not, “*shall be given,*” but “*shall be added,*” that you might learn, that the things present are no great part of His gifts, compared with the greatness of the things to come⁹².

The Church Fathers we have looked at appear to agree in giving a soteriological explanation of Jesus’s words. By telling us not to worry, Jesus is surely not suggesting that there will be no difficulties in our lives. To the contrary, we have made it the central point of this project that there will be great difficulties in the life of a disciple, for the servant is no greater than the master. Jesus instructs us not to *worry* because he sees that this interior disposition weakens and undermines our ability to trust, practice virtue, live in right relationship with God, and maintain the desire for eternal things.

3. *Jesus Infuses Confidence in His Disciples: John 14.* The Last Supper discourses in the Gospel of John 13-16 could rightly be called “The Discourse on the Father.” Jesus mentions the Father about 44 times in the space of 3 chapters⁹³. It is the supreme plea of Jesus for trust in Him and His Father:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many rooms [mansions]. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you⁹⁴?”

In order that the disciples might not fall away from fear and distrust, Jesus affirms

⁹² *ibid*, §4

⁹³ See www.blueletterbible.org as a source for this

⁹⁴ John 14: 1-2; RSV

Himself as God, encouraging them that just as they believe in God, they ought also to believe in Him. “For it follows,” says St. Augustine in his commentary on the Gospel of John, “that if you believe in God, you ought to believe also in me: which were no consequence if Christ were not God⁹⁵.” Jesus therefore urges his Apostles, and us, to not “let” their hearts be troubled, that is to say, “do not allow it to happen. If you notice trouble in your heart, *do something* to stop it!” And, as though this were not enough, the Divine Counselor again spurs us on by giving us further reasons and arguments to take His words for truth. Again, He does not settle his lesson without offering a persuasive argument as to why we should trust Him. He continues that, “In my Father’s house, there are many mansions.” How does this follow from Christ’s statement? It seems to come from nowhere. Aquinas comments that, by way of an assurance to the Apostles in their trouble, and in order that they might with confidence and certainty look forward to dwelling with Christ in the presence of the Father, he adds that there are many mansions in the Father’s house awaiting them and suited to their proper reward⁹⁶. Therefore, our Lord affirms that they should believe His word by promising that a reward awaits them. Without doubt, Jesus could have ended his discourse right there. Nonetheless, he continues to explain, to convince, and to plea with His Apostles to hear and trust in Him. He continues that, “If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” What a plea from the Savior! Not only does He tell us on His divine word to believe Him, or by assurance of a reward, but He finishes by *begging* for trust. He would have every right to say, for example, “Trust in God because I said so!” Yet, in kindness, He does not take this approach. On this point, Merikakis states that,

⁹⁵ *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, St Augustine, §67 available at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>

⁹⁶ *Cantena Aurea*, John, St. Thomas Aquinas

The proposal here by Jesus is open and frank: “First see who I am,” he seems to be saying, “consider my heart of hearts, understand my origin in the Father and my mission among you to reveal his love and goodness and only then decide for yourselves whether or not you want to [trust me]. Here, at the very least, we have a choice of lords, and this one Lord, Jesus, is offering to share with us the yoke of his own sonship, which is that of his gentle and lowly Heart...”⁹⁷

4. *The Marriage Feast of Cana*⁹⁸. As a final episode in our Scriptural exegesis on the theme of trust, we simply cannot finish without contemplating the role of Mary. We must meditate deeply on Mary’s unique role as mother to develop an understanding of how God has chosen to redeem us. It is from her — since He had no human father — that Jesus derives His being⁹⁹. There is a striking parallel between the appeal of Mary in John 2:5 and God the Father in Luke 9:35/Mark 9:7/Matthew 17:5. Mary tells the servants of the wedding, “Do whatever he tells you,” while the Father tells Peter, James, and John, “This is my son, the Beloved, listen to him!” It is Mary, the obedient one, who persuades, prepares, and also pleads with us to be obedient to Jesus. They both point to their common son, Jesus. St. Cyril of Alexandria, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, notes that:

The woman has great influence over the performance of the miracle, and she prevails by persuading the lord with an appeal to propriety, since he is her son. She begins the work by preparing the servants of the feast to do

⁹⁷ Merikakis, *The Way of the Disciple*, pg. 52

⁹⁸ Many of the insights and perspectives in this section come from *The Way of the Disciple*, chapter 8: The Disciple Contemplates the Mother.

⁹⁹ Obviously, Jesus does not derive His divine nature from Mary, and, in this sense, His being is “derived” entirely from the Father

whatever they are now instructed to do.¹⁰⁰

Allowing themselves to be persuaded by Mary's words, the servants carry out Jesus's instructions as water is miraculously turned into wine. The mystical application of this event to us lies in the mediation of Mary, properly understood through her cooperation with God that resulted in the Incarnation. If such mediation through Mary is necessary (that resulted in our redemption), can her role be any less necessary with respect to persuading us to be obedient and trusting servants of her son? Surely, any theology that begrudges Mary of her unique role as mediator and intercessor, a role designated to her by God Himself, is a skewed and prejudiced one.

We have now come to the end of our Scriptural exegesis on the theme of trust. Having pondered over various Old Testament and Gospel episodes, attaining a grasp of God's plea for trust, let us now turn to consider how we can respond to what we have just meditated upon in God's Word. To this end, we will consider trust as a virtue, various obstacles commonly encountered therein, and finally offer a spiritual remedy for those obstacles.

Part 3: The Virtue of Trust

Trusting God lies within the domain of free human action. It is a free response from within us to God's plea. He has set his plea before us that all may hear it; for, heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words will never pass away¹⁰¹. God begs, not

¹⁰⁰ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*. Translated by, Joel C. Elowsky, and David R. Maxwell. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2013. *eBook Religion Collection*

¹⁰¹ Matthew 24:35

because He has some need, but because He loves. He wishes, almost desperately, to save us from the undue stress and anxiety that we pile upon ourselves, and to replace our self-imposed burdens with the sweetness of his yoke. Merikakis continues:

Christ is inviting us to “give up trying to generate our own meaning and trying to be lords and masters of our own lives, and instead begin living by faith in what God can do for us. The fundamental truth of God’s reality as absolute Source has to be lived by each of us moment by moment, as our own deepest truth. Our sanctification consists in being willing to embrace with our actual lives the truth that already is found at the root of our existence: our creatureliness and utter dependence.”¹⁰²

On this point, we require no further need for reflection. The point regarding freedom, however, gets to the heart of our speaking about trust as a virtue, because virtue implies free choice by the acting subject. The person who trusts does not *allow himself* to be dragged down in fear and anxiety over transient things, especially to the point of forsaking or compromising those eternal things promised by our Lord. It is a personal act by the subject aided by God’s grace. Therefore Christ says, “Do not let,” (that is, ‘do not allow’) “your hearts be troubled. In my Father’s house there are many mansions.” What is essential to the virtue of trust, then, is a kind of patient and steadfast belief in the goodness of the Father who knows what we need. If one grasps on to the reality that God is always good, not good in an abstract philosophical way, but good to him personally, he will not be racked with inordinate anxieties, nor allow his spirit to be brought low by every transient obstacle that passes his way. A trusting person is not necessarily without anxiety nor completely fearless, but is brave. Fear and anxiety are natural responses to

¹⁰² Merikakis, *The Way of the Disciple*, pg. 46

evil. At times, we cannot help feeling afraid. It is an entirely involuntary somatic response. There is no lack of virtue when one experiences fear or anxiety. Even Our Lady experienced this at the loss of the Christ child in Jerusalem¹⁰³. Jesus Christ Himself was deeply imbedded with anxiety and fear at Gethsemane. It would be absurd to assert that, in these situations, Jesus and Mary lacked trust in God because they manifested these emotional states. Trust is more akin, therefore, not to fearlessness, but to bravery. A brave person understands the reality of a situation and the evil confronting him, yet does not allow himself to be drawn into that evil, and furthermore, does not lose the will to keep the realization of God's goodness firm within his interior. Nothing changes his realization that God is eternally good, merciful, and loving — to him personally. On the other hand, fearlessness does not imply trust. Josef Pieper, a well-known German Catholic philosopher, insightfully observes that fearlessness can be the result of one's false appraisal of reality, or even indifference, being entirely blind and deaf to the danger of evil¹⁰⁴. Trust in God is rooted in God's reliability and the truth of His words. Oftentimes, this realization is forced to outrun any evidence that we could specify. In fact, there seems to be very little evidence to suggest the goodness and trustworthiness of God unless one understands Him and His words to us. Robert Adams, who has written on philosophical theology and the virtue of faith, says:

We might think of unbelief as occurring in two forms: (1) not believing God when he speaks to us (that is, not believing what he says); and (2) not believing in God (that is, not trusting him, or not believing that he exists at all, or not believing important truths about him). In fact, however,

¹⁰³ Luke 2: 48

¹⁰⁴ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, p. 126

these forms of unbelief cannot be sharply separated. If we do not believe God when he speaks to us, it is probably because we do not trust him; and if we sin by not believing in God, it is what he says to us about himself that we do not believe.¹⁰⁵

We can apply Adams's words about belief and unbelief to trust and distrust. Distrust, in its truest form, necessarily rejects or dismisses something that God has said to us. But why would somebody not accept what God has revealed (and even pleaded with us to accept)? As we mentioned, people can be overrun with apparent evidence or reasons to doubt God's trustworthiness, hedging bets on God's fatherly devotion to take care of us. There is, and always will be, uncertainty in our lives, even for those who have attained great sanctity in their lives. Thus, "it is not a refusal to assent intellectually to theological truths" that is the central problem, but rather, "a failure to trust in truths to which we do assent¹⁰⁶." The problem of distrust does not therefore require incontestable philosophical arguments to fix it, but an interior change of heart. Our relationship with God is naturally tinged with uncertainty because He has set up a world in which it is primarily faith, and not knowledge, that is required to commune with Him. This might seem to puzzle us, though, because in lacking complete certainty about things, we may argue that this generates even more fears, for example, that God might let us down, that He may not reward our obedience, or that he will not bring good from our disasters. Many are paralyzed by uncertainty and decide to play it safe rather than venture up the mountain with God. The great irony in all of this is that the uncertainty we experience throughout life is the very catalyst for exercising the virtue of trust. Our uncertainties about God and

¹⁰⁵ Adams, Robert Merrihew. *Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Cary, US: Oxford University Press (US), 1987. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 31 March 2016, 16

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, 17

His providence make it possible for us to trust Him in a personal way. It is only to the extent that we are uncertain about God's action that we, in turn, cannot regard Him as any kind of extension of our own action¹⁰⁷. We are placed in a relationship of dependence and trust. Uncertainty is what creates the arena for trust.

Of what has been said, perhaps the most bewildering aspect of all is that God opens Himself in mutuality towards us, allowing Himself to be influenced by us and our prayers. Adams observes that this aspect is especially manifest when we are faced with a trial of faith, because it is only when something seems to impinge on a relationship of trust that the person's trust is tried in the fullest sense. The trial may come from oneself, from outside the relationship, or from the trusted person. In such a cause, significance lies in the response of the individual: to where do they go for help at that point? "If you turn," Adams notes, "to a third party to be your champion against the person you trusted, there is a serious breakdown in the relationship of trust. But if you go to the person you trust, to work through the problem or conflict with him or her, your trust is tried but not yet broken¹⁰⁸." A critical point is reached when, in spite of the felt experience of fear, anxiety, or uncertainty, one does not *allow* ("do not let") such things to poison their decision to trust in God or make compromises with His goodness.

1. *Trust means fidelity to God's action.* We mentioned earlier that Abraham is a unique exemplar of trust because he had no example to follow himself. There is much that we can learn from this, since most of us are very familiar with Abraham's story. The problem with this familiarity though, is that in being so familiar with the story, our ears get dulled regarding the details, and our imaginations are stifled. We have spoken of

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, 21

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, 23

Abraham as a model of faith and trust. He is a model, but he was not perfect at every step. He had to learn how to trust God by trial and error. There were a number of steps along the way where Abraham's trust wavered and he was not faithful to God's action in his life. It had to grow through trials. As time went on, Abraham's faith was strengthened. This is good for us to highlight because many of us have unrealistic images of biblical figures and saints. We see them as though they always walked around with halos around their heads and they did everything perfectly. In fact, this is never the case. St. Paul himself affirms this, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."¹⁰⁹ The Abraham narratives show us at least 3 times where he fell short in faith and fidelity to God. The first instance of it happens immediately after his call in Gen 12:4. God says to Abraham, "Go from your country and your kindred," and despite this request of God, Abraham took Lot with him. Lot would have been Abraham's nephew. We can perhaps read this as a signal that Abraham made some compromises with God. He puts some faith in God, but not all — he held back, not totally heeding God's request to "leave his kindred." As Abraham journeyed toward the land of promise, a severe famine struck the land, and Abraham abandoned the journey to reside in Egypt. If we read between the lines, Cavins observes that we can probably see this famine in light of Abraham's disobedience to God. Abraham has held back. So, too, does God hold back rain from the land¹¹⁰. Abraham's time in Egypt is not a good showing for him who was to become our father in faith. He relies on himself, even risking his own beautiful wife, Sarah. Fearful for his own life, he pretends to be Sarah's brother. Cavins notes that the scene is striking

¹⁰⁹ Romans 3:23

¹¹⁰ Cavins Jeff and Gray, Tim. *Walking with God: A Journey through the Bible*. Ascension Press, 2010, 35

also in that there is no encounter between God and Abraham anywhere between verses 10-20. The silence is significant — Abraham is far from God. The third incident is in reference to the promise God made to Abraham for an heir. In a moment of temptation, Sarah convinces Abraham (much like Eve convinced Adam) to take Hagar as a surrogate wife in order to have a child. It seems a little surprising that there is no immediate condemnation of this action, but the clear violation becomes manifest in the details of the stories to come. As Abraham learns, when he is not faithful to God, things do not go well. In bringing Lot with him, he holds back trust. In abandoning the journey to Canaan, he holds back trust. In turning to a surrogate wife out of fear of not having a child, he holds back trust. When looked at from this perspective, it might seem hard to understand why we call Abraham our father in faith. Abraham eventually learns to let Lot go and put more trust in God. In response, God mercifully promises Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and makes a covenant with him in Gen 15. With regard to the covenant, Cavins highlights a very interesting point:

Our first impulse is to picture this conversation happening as Abram sits alone in front of a dying campfire under a clear night sky spangled with a myriad of stars...But, as we read on, we discover something unexpected: the sun is high overhead, not going down for another seven verses (Gn 15: 12). God's command is given in broad daylight! Abram, staring up at the blue midday sky, could no more see the stars than he could see his countless descendants. God's message here is profound: while your sight is too weak to see the stars, I, the Lord, can see them; and I, the Lord, can also see your many descendants, even though you cannot...Abram must

have faith and trust in the Lord that these countless descendants will be given even if he has yet to see the very first one.¹¹¹

Abraham is a great example for us because he, like all of us, had to learn to trust God through the ups and downs of life. It was not a linear process. He started out weak, and grew stronger. God did not give up on him, nor did Abraham give up on God, even though he was not always faithful to God's intentions. Perfect trust remains faithful to what God disposes and desires, and rejects whatever is contrary.

There is one final thing we can point out about Abraham. His spirituality was much more simple than ours. He could only see what each successive moment of the day brought as the manifestation of God's will. Abraham was attentive to new duties and opportunities as they were presented to him at each moment by the providence of God. This must be true, because his spirit was turned inward enough to be able to hear and respond to God's invitation to leave all things behind and depart for a new land. He had no spiritual guide except God Himself. Abraham's life can teach us something very important: perhaps we complicate our spirituality too much, relying on methods or instructions that have been developed by spiritual writers through the many years of Christianity to lead us to God. Abraham, in fact, had none of this. He only knew what was immediately before him in the present moment, and he focused his attention on those matters. Of course, we do not know much context about Abraham's religiosity prior to his call in Genesis 12, but there is certainly something upright and honorable about his spirit. With such a holy disposition, Abraham was able to welcome God's action in his life because he was not swallowed up in the tide of his own activity. Being that it is not in the nature of God to force his grace upon us, Abraham must have had a passive element

¹¹¹ *ibid*, 38

in his spirit, that is, he left room in his life for God to spontaneously act. God's activity only resides in the present moment; therefore, Abraham must have been residing there also.

2. *Divine Action is concealed in the Present Moment.* Abraham helps teach us the value of the present moment. Devout and well-instructed persons know that God is present everywhere, but they conceptualize his presence something like the air that surrounds us. It is outside of us. While this is partly true of God, His presence to us is much closer than somewhere “around us” — He is within us¹¹². He resides in us as in a temple¹¹³. The concept of the present moment is an extremely important theological topic, because it is the only place where God performs his actions. Most of us see our lives as externally very ordinary and simple. There are very few extraordinary things that happen to us, and we see and experience many of the same things as everybody else. We go to work, speak to our family, and see our friends. We perform our daily duties and responsibilities. Yet, in the supernatural order, there is nothing ordinary, mundane, or unimportant. The duties of the present moment are the very bread that nourishes our growth in trust and holiness. These moments, like sacraments, are given to us by God day after day as opportunities for grace. Abraham's life teaches us that outwardly, these commonplace events are no different from those which happen to other people. Yet, to those who have faith, the invisible element is seen wherein God manifests His actions. It is not in the extraordinary, therefore, but primarily in the ordinary and humble events of our lives that we learn to love God and exercise fidelity to His will. Jean Pierre de Caussade, a French Catholic

¹¹² For those who are baptized

¹¹³ See 1 Cor 3:16 and John 14:23

priest noted for his work in spiritual direction and who emphasized the importance of the present moment, writes that:

If the work of our sanctification presents us with difficulties apparently so insurmountable, it is because we do not look at it in the right way. In reality, holiness consists in one thing alone, namely, fidelity to God's plan... They have only to fulfill the simple duties of the Catholic Faith and of their state of life, to accept with submission the crosses that go with those duties, and to submit with faith and love to the designs of Providence in everything that is constantly being presented to them to do and to endure, without searching for anything themselves.¹¹⁴

This was the message of Christ to his disciples in Matthew 6 and Luke 12. Jesus, wishing to free us from superfluous anxiety, exhorts us to dwell in the present, not worrying about the future. "So do not worry about tomorrow," He says, "for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today"¹¹⁵. If we stay within the present moment, we are best positioned to avoid undue anxiety and to receive the activity of God into our lives. The present moment is also addressed specifically and personally to us. Our knowledge comes from what we experience. It is, therefore, the arena in which we learn to trust God in the ups and downs of life. Like Abraham and Christ's disciples, it is often through trial and error that we learn to trust in God. The present moment provides these opportunities for growth in virtue, and it is the most practical. "Everything," asserts de Caussade, "is a means and an instrument of holiness; everything without any exception."¹¹⁶

3. Perfect trust does not necessarily understand God's designs, but submits to them.

¹¹⁴ Father J.P. De Caussade *Self Abandonment to Divine Providence*, Tan Books, pgs. 5, 7

¹¹⁵ Matthew 6:34

¹¹⁶ De Caussade, *Self Abandonment to Divine Providence*, p. 33

The Books of Job and Tobit are great examples of the fact that fidelity to God does not, of necessity, mean that one understands His providence, or knows the end of the road, but rather submits oneself to His will. Our Lord Himself affirms that there will be difficult times during the journey of discipleship, but that “anyone who endures to the end will be saved¹¹⁷.” Oftentimes our study of theology puts a great number of ideas in our head. However, if we are really to undertake the quest for a more perfect trust and fidelity to God, we must lay aside our books and our intellectual speculation, and begin living by faith in those very truths that we assent to, placing trust in the very things we study and seek to understand. We must put our theological speculation on one side, and with fidelity, take in everything that is presented to us by God’s designs. We can stand by a pool and speak about the qualities of water and wetness, but unless we jump in and get wet ourselves, we are really not undertaking the journey. It is not primarily speculation that teaches us trust, but experience. Tobit and Job lived moment by moment, trusting in God’s fidelity to them in spite of their sufferings. Their experiences are really no different than our own. They had whatever the present moment offered them, and they tried to remain faithful to God even though they were bewildered and given a thousand reasons to doubt His goodness. As we spoke of earlier, the arena for trust was created precisely by the fact that they did not understand God’s designs. Had they understood His deepest intentions, there would have been no room for faith or trust. The true philosopher’s stone of trust, therefore, resides in submission and acceptance to whatever God wills at this moment, and, maintaining a firm realization that whatever happens to us does not change our realization of God’s goodness.

¹¹⁷ Matthew 24:13

Part 4: Obstacles to Trust

“My child, know that the greatest obstacles to holiness are discouragement and an exaggerated anxiety. These will deprive you of the ability to practice virtue¹¹⁸”

In what has been discussed to this point, we have looked at select Scriptural figures and episodes, drawing out themes and guiding principles regarding trust. In what follows, we will take a similar approach in order to highlight common obstacles in one’s response to God’s plea for trust. For the most part, obstacles arise from within our own hearts. We want to continue to examine the theme of trust from the episodes and figures we have selected. Based on these, we can draw out basically 5 obstacles to address. They are fear, anxiety, disappointment, discouragement, and pride.

1. *Fear and Anxiety*. There really is no sin when we experience fear or anxiety. All people experience these states, even Jesus and Our Lady. The presence of it in our hearts is not a sign that we have failed to trust. That being said, a trusting person will never be overtaken with fear. Knowing that “all things work for good with those who love him [God],¹¹⁹” they are able to pull back the fear they may involuntarily experience, making a conscious decision to place their hope and trust in God despite any appearances to the contrary. Here we should say a few words about hope, because fear and hope are inversely related. There are two kinds of hope: natural and supernatural hope. Natural hope is kind of negative in the sense that it does not expect too much. We often say, “I

¹¹⁸ This quote, written as the voice of Jesus Christ, is taken from *The Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska*, Marian Press, 2013, pg. 1488

¹¹⁹ Romans 8:28

hope this happens,” or, “I hope that doesn’t happen.” We express hope tongue-in-cheek and mixed with doubt because we are never too sure. Natural hope is also usually excited by the things in this world. We see or hear of something attractive, and we want it. There are all sorts of things in the world that excite our hope such as falling in love, finding a good career, or visiting a foreign nation. These are things we seek, we grasp for, and, while they are goods, we often discover that these goods either find a way to evade us, or somehow disappoint us from what we expected of them. Thus, we get accustomed to disappointments until something new excites our hope again. This is natural hope. Supernatural hope, on the other hand, is entirely different. It is something infused in us at Baptism. As a theological virtue, the Catechism of the Catholic Church makes clear that hope makes us capable of acting as God’s children, animating and giving life to our moral character¹²⁰. It enables us to desire Heaven and eternal life, and so to see earthly events in light of eternity, placing our trust in God’s promises rather than worldly infatuations. It allows us to see something good even in the worst tragedies, remaining in a posture of faith and trust, and not becoming too discouraged by passing circumstances. This is also the hope that we ought to pray with in order to avoid presumption. St. John tells us that “...this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him¹²¹.” This is supernatural hope. It means that we can be sure and certain that God answers our prayers if they help us along the road to salvation. This way, if we do not receive what we ask for in prayer, we will not get discouraged because we will recognize that God knows it is not good for us to

¹²⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1813

¹²¹ 1 John 5:14-15

have. On this point about supernatural hope, we will close with an excellent summary from C.S. Lewis:

The Christian says, ‘Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing...I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.’¹²²

Fear is primarily what caused the disciples to lose their senses during the storm at sea. Struck with fear, they cried out and protested the Lord’s apparent indifference. It became a major obstacle in their ability to trust the Lord’s words, “let us go to the other side.” Fear caused the disciples to lose their reason, forgetting that the Lord was in the same boat as they were. The Lord had deliberately arranged a spiritual showdown on the Sea of Galilee to test his disciples. Their failure is our instruction. No matter what the storm, we must keep our eyes on Jesus, trusting in Him, not being overtaken by fear and losing our senses, nor allowing any tribulation to change our realization of God’s tender love for each of us.

¹²² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. HarperOne, 2005, pgs. 136-137

2. *Disappointments and Discouragements.* It is a sad reality that we are not fazed by scandals in our modern culture. We are faced with scandals day after day whenever we listen to the news. We also hear of suicide bombings or mass killings at least once or twice a week. We are constantly bombarded with scandal and disappointment. As a result, we no longer actually feel disappointed by things. We are at the point of being conditioned not to be disappointed! There is a huge lack of trust embedded in our culture. We always want guarantees. We do not purchase cars without some kind of guarantee, and we hardly do anything or buy anything unless there is a guarantee attached to it. Disappointments come in all shapes and sizes; some are big, some little. We can learn a lot about trust by examining the life of Jesus in the Gospels and how he reacted to disappointments. Jesus, in fact, was never disappointed because he could see the will of God in everything that happened. This is evident when we examine Jesus's words and actions in the face of the scandals and disappointments He encountered. Jesus handled discouragements and disappointments in three ways: by love, by forgiveness, and by trust in His Father's will. Rather than yielding to disappointments, He prays, He loves, and He forgives. To illustrate this, let us briefly examine these episodes from the Gospel.

1a. *The Denial of Peter*¹²³. Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him. He had predicted this to Peter himself. Even though Jesus foresaw the event of Peter's denial, it certainly does not take away the sense of disappointment. Even Peter, disappointed in himself, "went away and wept bitterly." If the story had ended here, it would certainly be a huge disappointment for all future generations. Judas, who was a true disappointment, could have been one of the greatest saints in world history. Because he could not forgive

¹²³ Luke 22:54-62

himself nor allow God to forgive him, he is one of the greatest disappointments in world history. It is sad that he denied Jesus the opportunity to exercise His infinite mercy towards him, as He did to Peter. The story of Peter's denial draws power from how Jesus reacted in John 21 after His resurrection. Rather than giving way to disappointment, Jesus loved Peter, not even mentioning the event. He simply asked Peter if he loved him. Peter, certainly feeling the sting of guilt, replied that of course he loves Jesus. This is a marvelous example of love and forgiveness as a response to disappointment. It is admittedly not easy to take this approach, but the alternative can only be anger, bitterness, or any slew of other maladaptive attitudes.

2a. *The Crucifixion.* What an awesome disappointment it must have been for Jesus's disciples to come to terms with the fact that He was arrested, convicted, and about to be murdered. The very words of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "we had hoped that he would be the one to redeem Israel¹²⁴," expressed such disappointment. There is a stark contrast between the Apostles who fled in fear and trembling, discouraged and disappointed, and Jesus, who in response to His condemnation and execution, pleads with the Father to forgive His murderers. Jesus knew perfectly what His Father's will was, and so was not entrenched in anger or bewilderment. He did not give in to discouragement either. He responded to what appeared as utter failure with forgiveness: "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing." Cleaving to His Father's wishes, He placed all of His trust in God when, humanly speaking, He had every reason to feel discouraged. Jesus did not grow discouraged because He trusted. He paved a road for us to follow, and since He did not become interiorly vexed by transient events, neither

¹²⁴ Luke 24:21

should we. It is often not in our power to change or add to circumstances, but only to remain in a posture of faith as disappointments come our way. This is the way of Jesus, and it also must be ours.

3a. *Jesus before Pilate*¹²⁵. This is one of the most striking episodes in all of Sacred Scripture. Jesus, having allowed Himself to become totally powerless and abused, stands before Pilate to be judged. What a reversal! Yet, Jesus maintained perfect self-control and did not sink into discouragement. Jesus, as we have said repeatedly, saw the will of God in everything. He recognized and even told Pilate that he would have no power to judge Him if God had not given it to him¹²⁶. These are words of radical self-abandonment to God's will. Jesus knew full well what was happening. Even in this situation, He remained utterly at peace because He was totally faithful to God's will, despite all appearances to the contrary. Jesus's attitude powerfully puts in relief the way that Pilate now sees himself. Jesus, unlike everybody else surrounding Pilate, does not think like they do. If anything was to happen to Jesus, He knew that it was only because His Father wished it for the salvation of the world, not because Pilate exercised any kind of providence over Him. The irony is that Pilate was weak and Jesus was strong in this scene. Jesus made Himself weak in order to encounter Pilate, and each of us, in our weakness. Great lover of mankind that He is, Jesus did not condemn Pilate or dispute with him. He began a dialogue of love, seeking to kindle in him the light of faith. Jesus did not see in Pilate a Roman tyrant to be overthrown or rebelled against. He saw another needy human being, and, penetrating into his inmost heart, tried leading him to the truth. Pilate, for his part, seemed taken back, yet deeply affected, by such an encounter with a man who was about

¹²⁵ See John 18:33-38

¹²⁶ See John 19:11

to be executed.

4. *Pride*. Pride is the ugly mother of all vice because it engenders every other sin that can possibly be committed. It can manifest itself in many different ways and looks different in everybody. Above all, pride is diametrically opposed to trust. It rejects the notion that someone is wiser and better than myself, and, it makes us think that we know everything and carry all the solutions. If one thinks that he knows everything, how can he possibly be free enough to receive what God wishes to teach him? No, this is not the way to trust. We must be humble in order to trust. Humility, on the contrary, involves recognizing how little we know and accepting that God is wiser and more omniscient than we are. Furthermore, we ought to recognize that our dignity and freedom are not subverted by submitting ourselves to God's action even when it seems to go against us. On the contrary, freedom is measured by one's availability to obey God. Insofar as we are unable to obey God and be faithful to His will, we are not free. Instead, we are caught in selfishness. Selfishness, like disobedience, is naturally a form of pride because it says, "I don't care what you want me to do. I will do what I want to do." On this point, Evagrius Ponticus, a spiritual disciple of the Cappadocians and spiritual writer during the 4th century, writes that there are eight generic tempting thoughts that always contain within themselves every other tempting thought. He wrote about them after being encouraged by St. Melania to become a monk and go to the desert of Egypt. He wrote treatises for the monks on various spiritual topics, evil thoughts, and prayer¹²⁷. Included among his writings is the *Praktikos*, which has come to be known in a more concentrated form as the *8 Evil Thoughts*. The 8 evil thoughts include gluttony, sexual immorality, love of

¹²⁷ My source for information about St. Melania and Evagrius comes from a lecture by Professor Illaria R.E. Ramelli at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, MI, 2014.

money, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. His writings on pride are among the most frightful of the 8 evil thoughts:

The demon of pride conducts the soul to its worst fall. It urges it (1) not to admit God's help, (2) and to believe that the soul is responsible for its own achievements, (3) and to disdain the brethren as fools because they do not all see this about it. This demon is followed by (1) anger and (2) sadness and the final evil, (3) utter insanity and madness, and visions of mobs of demons in the air.¹²⁸

Evagrius and the other desert fathers sought to remove spiritual obstacles by controlling their thoughts, redirecting sinful thoughts (known as logismoi) to holy things. The mental and physical discipline they practiced was all meant to help free them from the logismoi, and to remain in constant union with God. Evagrius and the desert fathers provide a vivid example of how dangerous the sin of pride can be. It sets up a very serious interior structure of unbelief because it rejects, or at least seeks to mitigate the possibility that God knows a situation better than we, and that we should not submit ourselves to His will.

5. Psychology. Another obstacle to trusting God comes from within our own psychology. If we are honest, many of the problems in our lives are due to the fact that our life circumstances are not the way we want them to be. The reason, therefore, that we get into a state of distrust is because we believe that we are not matching up to the ideals we have set up in our minds. By doing this, we allow our trust in God to be dictated by external circumstances. In other words, we think that we cannot trust God unless things in our lives pan out in a certain way. However, this is a lie. Events and external circumstances are not supposed to dictate our faith or trust in God. This belief is not true and it severely

¹²⁸ Evagrius Ponticus. *The Praktikos* §6,14. available at http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm

limits our ability to trust God when bad things inevitably happen. Many of us rely on “conditional happiness” in the sense that if certain conditions are in place, we will be happy and able to trust God. A person who is truly able to trust, however, has the ability to maintain the realization of God’s goodness in spite of circumstances that do not make us feel happy.

Part 5: The Spiritual Remedy for Mistrust

I sent prophets wielding thunderbolts to My people. Today I am sending you with My mercy to the people of the whole world. I do not want to punish aching mankind, but I desire to heal it, pressing it to My Merciful Heart.¹²⁹

The obstacles to trust that we have just examined certainly do not touch upon every possible spiritual impediment that can occur in a person’s life. Of course, there are many hurts that come to us in different forms throughout our lives, some proving to cause greater barriers than others in our ability to trust another. We wanted to touch on those which seem to be the most common and most generic, including those that could be examined in light of the selected Scriptural episodes chosen. Keeping this in mind, along with the other psychological factors that can influence each person’s openness to trust, our next step is to look at spiritual remedies for doubt and distrust. All of us, if we are honest, have at least some mistrust that gets mixed in with our desire to trust in God. In recognizing that we do not trust God as much as we ought, God is able to heal our spiritual maladies. In fact, God is constantly at work to sanctify us. If we had faith, we would be able to recognize without difficulty that God’s fatherly care leads Him to give us at each moment what is best suited for us. We learn this truth from Jesus, who tells us

¹²⁹ The voice of Jesus Christ from *The Diary of St. Faustina*, §1588

that the Father knows our needs, even how many hairs are on our heads, and that we should ask him each day for our daily necessities. With a Father who is so solicitous for our well-being, does it not seem irrational that we should give way to mistrust?

1. *Distrust vs. Mistrust.* A distinction is in order here between mistrust and distrust.

Mistrust is probably where most of us fall on the scale of trust. We place some trust in God, but not all, or at least not right away. We saw this in the life of Abraham. The prefix “mis” has a meaning that tends to imply a lack of something or a deficiency. In this sense, mistrust is trust that gets mixed up with some doubts, discouragements, and therefore lacks the level of confidence that Christ wishes for us to place in God. Hence we have words like misspeak, mistake, or misunderstand. The “mis” prefix carries a softer implication. It is not a total negation, but a deficiency and an imperfection. When we misspeak or misunderstand, for example, there is some truth contained in our words and our understanding, but also a deficiency.

Distrust, on the other hand, carries a stronger meaning. It implies a total rejection of trust. The prefix “dis” is stronger. It tends to mean a “reversal” of something, or something utterly negative. Hence we have words like disconnect, discourage, disappoint, or disrespect. When we are disconnected, for example, it is not merely a privation or deficiency, but a total absence of what should be there. These words refer to a complete severing of something. If we could create a “continuum of trust,” it could look something like this:



It is a striking part of Jesus’s ministry that he always had a remedy for every situation, every illness, every argument, and every confrontation with evil. Each remedy looked different for each person. We only need to consider the way Jesus treated the Syrophenician woman¹³⁰, or blind Bartimaeus¹³¹, or the man born blind¹³². Jesus even treated people who had similar ailments with different remedies. There was no situation so messy or complicated that Jesus was not able to prescribe a remedy for. Yet, in all situations, there is a common thread of faith. It appears that Jesus’s hands are tied, so to speak, unless the person has *some* degree of faith and trust in Him: “He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith,¹³³” and again to the two blind men he asked, “Do you believe I can do this¹³⁴?” Oftentimes, Jesus declared that it was not He who cured the person’s ailment, but rather, the person’s faith was primarily responsible for his or her own healing. In a sense, the remedy for the problem was within himself or herself:

- Go; your faith has made you well¹³⁵
- Your faith has saved you; go in peace¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Mark 7:27

¹³¹ Mark 10:46

¹³² John 9

¹³³ Mark 6:5-6

¹³⁴ Matthew 9:28

¹³⁵ Mark 10:52

- Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.¹³⁷
- Then he said to them, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.”¹³⁸

2. Faith is the Remedy. The point of all this is to highlight the spiritual remedy for mistrust. It is faith. Faith in Christ and his promises curbs our greatest struggles and disappointments because it recognizes that there is something other than this world. When things go wrong, a person of faith is not dragged down, because his faith allows him to pierce through transient circumstances and recognize that whatever God allows can only be for his good. Nothing can befall us unless it is decreed in some way by God and His providence. Thus, for a Christian, there is no cause for worry whatsoever. When things are good, a person of faith is also not too elated, because he recognizes that whatever good exists can only be from God. They are like a balance at equilibrium, never cast down in discouragement nor puffed up in pride or elation.

Faith is a gift, a grace from God. It is also our response to God, who has freely revealed Himself to us. It takes a special gift from the Trinity to convince us to believe that what He tells us is absolutely true. Jesus affirms this when Peter confesses Him to be the Christ. “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven¹³⁹.” The Catechism notes that faith is a gift from God, which implies that no person can exercise it unless he is first moved and assisted by God to believe¹⁴⁰. This belief takes on two forms: the first is (1) to believe in God, and (2) to believe that what God says is true. It is entirely possible to walk through life

¹³⁶ Luke 7:50

¹³⁷ Mark 5:34

¹³⁸ Luke 18:42

¹³⁹ Matthew 16:17

¹⁴⁰ CCC 153

believing in God, yet not really believing his words. However, for a Christian who has heard God's words in one way or another, we must expect to find some kind of uneasiness in their spirit (that is, if they believe in God but not in His words). The Word of God is not ineffectual. If we do not believe God, whether through mistrust or distrust, we should expect to find a trace of uneasiness in our hearts, prompting us to reconsider our interior attitudes. Faith, however, involves trust. As we know from our personal relationships, trust takes time to develop. Like Abraham, it takes most of us time, trial-and-error, to learn that we can trust God. For His part, God seems to live with the fact that most of us need time in order to learn this lesson. He puts up with the fact that we like to taste good and evil before we mature enough to make our ultimate decision to choose the Good.

3. *The Eucharist.* In the days of Moses, God gave manna from Heaven to fill the needs of the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. It was their daily portion that did not exceed what was necessary for the day. It was a gracious response from God that carried two purposes: It (1) filled their need for food and, (2) it served as a reminder and a foretaste of the Promised Land, "a land flowing with milk and honey." After an extended period of eating nothing but the manna, the Israelites, tired of it, cried out again, lamenting the days in Egypt when they had their share of meat. Cavins comments that the Israelites, having received the manna as a foretaste of the Promised Land, rejected it, forgetting to see it as a promise of what lies ahead, and, losing hope in God's promise to them, abandoned the route that God's providence has destined for them¹⁴¹. The manna was God's original provision for them when they cried out for food. When they cried out

¹⁴¹ Cavins Jeff and Gray, Tim. *Walking with God: A Journey through the Bible*. Ascension Press, 2010, pg. 40

again, there seems to be more at play than general dissatisfaction with water and food. They began attacking Moses's authority and God's providence. This is evident in the satirical-rhetorical questioning of the Israelites: "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us?"¹⁴² Both the Book of Exodus and the Book of Numbers record this grumbling and rebellion of the Israelites, but there is an interesting difference in that the Book of Exodus tends to stress God's patience and forbearance, whereas, in the Book of Numbers, we see how Israel's constant grumbling leads God to punish them over and over again. Here are a few examples¹⁴³:

Exodus 14 – 17	Numbers 11 – 21
Ex 14:10 People complain that Egyptians are about to slay them: God opens the Red Sea	Num 11:1 People grumble against God at Taberah: fire punishes them
Ex 15:23 Israel grumbles at Elim about bitter water: Moses cures the water	Num 11:4 People grumble about no meat: God sends quail, but also a plague
Ex 16:3 People grumble at no food in the desert of Sin	Num 12 Miriam and Aaron rebel against Moses: God gives Miriam leprosy
Ex 17:2 No water at Rephidim: God gives water from the rock	Num 14 People rebel at desert stay: God extends time to forty years
	Num 16 Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebel against Moses: God consumes them in fire
	Num 20 People grumble about lack of water: Moses strikes water from the rock
	Num 21 People grumble about food: God sends fiery serpents

¹⁴² Exodus 17:3

¹⁴³ This chart is taken verbatim from Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, Paulist Press, 2012, p. 161

We can probably understand the repetition and differences in the stories as coming from different sources. However, if we remember that the composite before us has a theological purpose, we should keep in mind that the narrative details of incidents along the way are ordered to this end. In other words, we can learn something about God and our theme of trust in this. Lawrence Boadt suggests that examining the Books of Exodus and Numbers in this way can lead us to understand that “God cannot be pushed too far before asserting his own justice and honor. Yet even at a late hour, he could turn from his anger and spare them, if they would only turn to him¹⁴⁴.”

The Eucharist has a rich biblical foundation in the Old Testament. The very concept of sacrifice is an extremely rich one when examined through the lens of the Old Covenant. We will not be able to touch on this because it would take us too far away from our theme of trust. Nonetheless, there were various types and features of sacrifices such as a holocaust, a sin offering, a trespass offering, and a grain/peace offering. There are also figures whose actions prefigure the Eucharistic Sacrifice such as Abel, Abraham, and Melchizadek. Probably the most important of all prefigurements is Passover, wherein the blood of the lamb preserved believers from death. All three of these things signify the Eucharist, namely, the rites of the Old Testament (such as the bread/wine offering of Melchizadek), the manna (nourishment), and the actual sacrifices (expiation/atonement).

In a more direct reference to what we have just previously been discussing, the Eucharist takes on the story of the manna in the desert and raises it to glorious new heights. Jesus, the “bread come down from heaven,” has left us the Eucharist as a foretaste not of an earthly Promised Land, but of the Resurrection and eternal life with

¹⁴⁴ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, pg. 162

God. It commemorates the manna in the desert because it is a remembrance that man does not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God. He gives us our daily bread today through the Eucharist as a new pledge of His faithfulness to His promise. When Jesus instituted the Eucharist, He gave a new and definitive meaning to the manna in the desert, which served as a reminder for a foretaste of an earthly land, to a new reminder and foretaste of our Heavenly home. As a pledge and a promise, but also Christ Himself, the Eucharist not only serves as inspiration for us to trust in God's providential care, but it also effects in us the actual grace to trust. It is the source of trust. The Eucharist reminds us that God has made a covenant with us to redeem us and give us eternal life. He is utterly trustworthy in virtue of the fact that He abides with us until the end of time in the Tabernacle as our food. We can be sure of his faithfulness each time we approach the holy Eucharist because His pledge to us is nothing less than Himself. We must take this, then, to be the foundation for any serious Christian existence: to return day-after-day to this fountain and source of grace, truly the "one thing necessary," the life of our souls, the holy Eucharist.

Part 6: Pulling it All Together

The Sacred Scriptures have much to offer us in the way of teaching us about trust. It is a key theme that runs through the entirety of the Bible. Hopefully, the figures and episodes that were selected offered some intellectual and pragmatic contributions to strengthen our claim that God's plea for trust usually implies suffering and frustration. It does not necessarily mean that our lives will turn out according to our plans or hopes, or

even that we will be relieved from our sufferings in this life. The ability to trust is itself a reward because it unites us with God through a union of our wills. At this point, it may be helpful to offer a summary of what has been considered throughout this project.

As we have worked through this project, perhaps we have had a particular situation in mind. We can ask ourselves, “Have I been trusting God? Do I share any common experiences with the great Patriarchs or Saints from ancient times who had to learn to trust God through the fabric of their lives?” We first mentioned Abraham, our father in faith. While he provides a kind of paradigm for our own journey, we noted that even he had to learn trust by trial and error. He battled with moments of mistrust and temptations to doubt that God would come through for him. We also considered Tobit and Job, whose stories teach us that conventional wisdom (such as Deuteronomic Theology) does not always apply to God, and that His ways are often unable to be fathomed. This is just a fact of life that we have to accept. By doing so, we grow in humility. Tobit and Job also taught us that God can take the worst events and turn them into benefits for us. The very occasions, circumstances, or persons that cause us to suffer are a rich source of merit because they allow us to trust God with no ulterior motives. We can make a conscious choice to trust Him despite all evidence to the contrary. Having looked at select Old Testament examples, we then turned our attention to the pearl of the Bible, the Gospels. Within, we attempted to pay attention to all the details in Jesus’s conduct from selected episodes in His life with the disciples. We examined the storm on the sea, and the disciples lack of faith in the face of danger, even though they had Jesus’s word that they would cross to the other side, and that He was right there with them. Having witnessed Jesus the wonder worker, we then studied Jesus’s words to his

disciples on the topic of anxiety. We saw what great lengths He went to in order to convince His listeners to trust in God. Giving example after example and reason after reason, he exhorted his hearers to not to worry because they have a Father in Heaven who knows their needs and desires to bestow a kingdom upon them. The Gospel of John provided the most vivid example of God's plea for trust. Jesus, at the last supper, spoke intimately to His disciples, affirmed Himself as God, and begged for their trust. As God, Jesus could easily have told the disciples, "Hey, believe what I say, *period*." Yet, Jesus does not do this. He is patient. He pleads, He begs: "If it were not so, I would have told you," He adds on to His discourse. "There are many mansions in my Father's house." It is as if He is saying, "Please, please believe me!" As a final example, we felt compelled to contemplate the example of the Mother of Jesus and her role in bringing us to filial trust in God. Mary persuades the servants to trust in her Son, Jesus. In union with the Father, she encourages us to listen and be obedient to the Lord Jesus. Both Mary and the Father point to their common son, Jesus, and ask that we listen to and trust Him.

After mining through various Scriptural passages, we turned our attention to trust as an expression of virtue and free human action. Examining how the Scriptures bring out guiding examples and principles for our understanding and practice of trust, we looked at various themes such as fidelity to divine action, the theology of the present moment, and the notion that trust does not imply an understanding of God's designs, but submission to them in faith and trust.

By seeing trust through the lens of virtue and free human action, we were naturally inclined to discuss what obstacles can be presented in our exercise of trust. We spoke on the difference between natural hope and supernatural hope, noting that

supernatural hope is a gift from God that allows us to remain in a posture of trust even when things seem to go against us. The most common and general obstacles we discussed were fear, anxiety, disappointment, discouragement, and pride. We observed that fear and anxiety are not of themselves sinful, since even the Blessed Mother and Christ experienced these feelings, but they can erect interior structures of unbelief, paralyzing our ability to trust and keep our realization that God is always good and never allows anything to befall us unless it works for our sanctification. In treating of discouragements and disappointments, we looked in particular at how Jesus reacted to disappointments during His life. Rather than being dejected by them, he responded with love, forgiveness, and abandonment to God's will. Pride was our final consideration. Noting that pride is diametrically opposed to the virtue of trust, we mentioned that pride rejects the notion that somebody knows a situation better than I or that somebody could be better and wiser than I am. To help illustrate the point about pride, we briefly examined a writing of Evagrius Ponticus, a desert father from the 4th century, in order to see to what lengths the vice of pride can obstruct our ability to trust God. Lastly, we looked at faith as a spiritual remedy for the lack of trust we may find in our lives. Faith is able to "fill in the gaps," so to speak, where we lack certainty because it informs us that nothing can happen to us unless it is decreed by God, Who only acts for our good. Not only does faith allow us to believe in God, it also allows us to believe that what God says is true. Moreover, faith enables us to trust in those truths we acknowledge as true, so that we can really live our lives according to what God has revealed. As our capstone, we discussed the Eucharist as the fundamental condition that enables us to live our Christianity seriously. It is the ultimate pledge of God's faithfulness and plea for trust. Because it is Christ Himself, it is

also the source and fountain of spiritual grace for us during our earthly journey to our eternal promised land. As we continue to put effort into our relationship with God by exercising the virtue of trust, we will experience His Fatherly care and providence, as Jesus has promised, for “without faith it is impossible to please God,” and, “whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him¹⁴⁵.”

¹⁴⁵ Hebrews 11:6

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