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Typology, How the Old Testament Prefigures the New

Talk #6

Typology in Genesis 2-11



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6. Typology in Genesis 2-11

Eden Is a Type of Heaven

Last week we looked at the typology of Adam and Eve as types of Christ and His Mother. This typology of the creation story in Genesis 2 also extends to Eden itself. As the first Adam is a type of the New Adam, so the first dwelling place of Adam in the Garden of Eden is a type of heaven (and the Church). Like most types or figures, the reality far surpasses the type. Heaven will transcend Eden as much as Christ transcends Adam. 1 Corinthians 15:44–49 develops the contrast:

If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual.⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

In Eden there were supernatural and preternatural gifts, but glory—consisting in the vision of God—was not yet given.

A key element of the typology of Eden concerns the tree of life in the center of the Garden, and, secondarily, a river watering the Garden and flowing out of it. Genesis 2:8–10 describes it:

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.¹⁰ A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

After the original sin, God expelled man from the Garden of Eden so that he could no longer eat from the tree of life, for he had deserved to experience death by his sin:

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” -- therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.¹

1 Gen 3:22–24.

The tree of life indicates the gift of physical immortality, given in Eden as a preternatural gift, and lost by original sin. It also represents the sharing in the divine life made possible by sanctifying grace, and which will be perfected in glory.

In both respects, the tree of life prefigures the Eucharist, which is both the pledge of the future Resurrection and a present provider of the nourishment of sanctifying grace. The access to the tree of life that was lost after the original sin is restored through the Eucharist—the bread of life. Christ brings out this aspect of the Eucharist in the bread of life discourse in John 6:50–51:

This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, in one of the first post-biblical reflections on the Eucharist, brings out the parallel of the Eucharist with the tree of life, speaking of it as a “medicine of immortality, the antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ.”² St. Justin, writing in the middle of the second century, likewise sees the tree of life in the Garden as a type of Christ,³ who vivifies His Church with Himself in the Eucharist.⁴

This typology is brought out in the prophet Ezekiel and the book of Revelation. The prophet Ezekiel sees a vision of water coming out of the Temple and flowing toward the Dead Sea. Where the river reaches, it brings life, and the further it flows, the deeper it gets. On either side of the waters of this river “there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing” (Ez 47:12). The resemblance with the Garden of Eden is clear. The river running from the Temple recalls the river in Eden watering

2 St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians* 20, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 199. This analogy between the tree of life and the Eucharist is found, for example, in St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 86.1, and in the ninth century in Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini* 1.6, PL 120:1272.

3 St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 86.1, in ANF 1:340: “Hear, then, how this Man, of whom the Scriptures declare that He will come again in glory after His crucifixion, was symbolized . . . by the tree of life, which was said to have been planted in paradise.”

4 This analogy between the tree of life and the Eucharist is found in the ninth century in Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini* 1.6, PL 120:1272.

the Garden, and it works healing, thus giving supernatural life and “extending” Eden, as it were.⁵

Jesus implicitly identifies Himself with the river of living waters in John 4 and 9. In John 4:10–14, Jesus says to the Samaritan woman:

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. . . . Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

If there were any doubt about the identity of this “living water,” it is clarified in John 7:37–38, where Jesus says: “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” John then explains the meaning of the “living water”: “Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”¹⁶

The final chapter of the Bible returns to this image of the water of life and the tree of life in the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev 22:2. Here the water is said to be the “river of the water of life” that flows through the middle of the holy City, on either side of which grows “the tree of life” whose leaves are “for the healing of the nations.” The water of life is the participation in the divine life (sanctifying grace) promised by Jesus, and the tree of life seems to refer to a sacramental means of receiving supernatural healing, which we can identify with the seven sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular.

It can be seen from this sacramental typology that Eden is not only a type of heaven, but is also a type of the Church, in which Paradise is already restored in germ. Baptism thus is spoken of by many of the Fathers as an opening of the gates of Paradise, which were closed to mankind at the Fall.

This can be seen in the pre-baptismal exorcism in all the early liturgies of Baptism. The candidate faced west during the exorcism and renunciation of Satan, and then would turn to face east when reciting the Creed and receiving Baptism. The east, as the direction of the rising sun, is associated with Eden restored, Christ, and His second coming. The west, by opposition, was associated with Satan.⁷ St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains the symbolism:

⁵ See also Psalm 1, in which the same image of the living waters and the tree whose fruit does not fail is applied to the man who meditates on the Torah.

⁶ John 7:39.

⁷ See St. Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 7: “You entered, then, that you might discern your adversary, whom you were to renounce as it were to his face, then you turned to the east; for he who renounces the devil turns to Christ, and beholds Him face to face.”

So when you renounce Satan, you trample underfoot your entire covenant with him, and abrogate your former treaty with Hell. The gates of God’s Paradise are open to you, that garden which God planted in the east, and from which our first parent was expelled for his transgression. When you turned from west to east, the region of light, you symbolized this change of allegiance. Then you were told to say: “I believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and in one baptism of repentance.”⁸

The typology of Eden and the Church is also present in the ancient practice of the Church to face east in all liturgical prayer. The east represents both Eden restored and Christ, the Light of the world, who will come from the east in His second coming. St. John Damascene explains this venerable tradition:

It is not for simplicity nor by chance that we pray turned toward the regions of the east.... Since God is intelligible light (1 Jn. 1:5), and in the Scripture, Christ is called the Sun of justice (Mal. 3:20) and the East (Zec. 3:8 of the LXX), it is necessary to dedicate the east to him in order to render him worship. The Scripture says: ‘Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed’ (Gen. 2:8).... In search of the ancient homeland and tending toward it, we worship God. Even the tent of Moses had its curtain veil and propitiatory facing the east. And the tribe of Judah, in as much as it was the most notable, encamped on the east side (cf. Nm. 2:3). In the temple of Solomon, the Lord’s gate was facing the east (cf. Ez. 44:1). Finally, the Lord placed on the cross looked toward the west, and so we prostrate ourselves in his direction, facing him. When he ascended to heaven, he was raised toward the east, and thus his disciples adored him, and thus he will return, in the same way as they saw him go to heaven (cf. Acts 1:11), as the Lord himself said: ‘For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be’ (Mt. 24:27). Waiting for him, we prostrate ourselves toward the east. It is an unwritten tradition, deriving from the Apostles.⁹

Joseph Ratzinger explained the theological importance of facing east in the liturgy in his *Spirit of the Liturgy*:

Despite all the variations in practice that have taken place far into the second millennium, one thing has remained clear for the whole of Christendom: praying toward the East is a tradition that goes back to the beginning. Moreover, it is a fundamental expression of the Christian synthesis of cosmos and history, of being rooted in the once-for-all events of salvation

⁸ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses* 1.9, in Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 73.

⁹ John of Damascus, *Expositio accurata fidei orthodoxae* IV, 12: PG 94, 1133-1136.

history while going out to meet the Lord who is to come again. Here both the fidelity to the gift already bestowed and the dynamism of going forward are given equal expression.¹⁰

The Temptation

The temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden can be seen as a type of the temptations of every man, of Christ, and of the Church. In *Dominum et vivificantem* 36, John Paul II develops the notion of the original sin as a type of every human sin in its refusal to respect the limitation of the human condition as a creature, subject to the eternal law of God:

According to the Book of Genesis, “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” was to express and constantly remind man of the “limit” impassable for a created being. God’s prohibition is to be understood in this sense: the Creator forbids man and woman to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The words of the enticement, that is to say the temptation, as formulated in the sacred text, are an inducement to transgress this prohibition—that is to say, to go beyond that “limit”: “When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God [“like gods”], knowing good and evil.”

“Disobedience” means precisely going beyond that limit, which remains impassable to the will and the freedom of man as a created being. For God the Creator is the one definitive source of the moral order in the world created by him. Man cannot decide by himself what is good and what is evil—cannot “know good and evil, like God.” In the created world God indeed remains the first and sovereign source *for deciding about good and evil*, through the intimate truth of being, which is the reflection *of the Word*, the eternal Son, consubstantial with the Father.

John Paul returned to this theme in *Veritatis splendor* 35, in which he speaks of the original sin of Adam and Eve as the archetype of the root problem of much of contemporary moral theology. John Paul II interprets the commandment not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as a symbol for the limits of the creativity of human conscience. Knowledge of good and evil, in the sense of objectively *determining* good and evil, is reserved to the eternal law of God. Human reason can grasp a part of the truth about good and evil contained in the eternal law, but it cannot seek to put itself over the eternal law, as if it were completely autonomous in ethical decision making in human affairs.¹¹

¹⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 75.

¹¹ See *VS* 40: “Nevertheless, the autonomy of reason cannot mean that reason itself creates values and moral norms. Were this autonomy to imply a denial of the participation of the practical reason in the wisdom of the divine Creator and Lawgiver,

Cain and Abel

The story of Cain and Abel is deeply typological. The sacrifice of Abel (Gen 4:4) is mentioned in the Roman Canon as a type of Christ’s sacrifice. Abel’s blood spilled on the ground and crying out to God (Gen 4:10) is put forward as a type of Christ’s Blood in Hebrews 12:22–25:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.

The typology of Abel is extremely common in the Fathers. St. Augustine interprets the story of Cain and Abel in terms of a moral typology, according to which the brothers prefigure the division of mankind into two cities: the city of God and the city of this world. He writes:

Now, the first man born of the two parents of the human race was Cain. He belonged to the city of man. The next born was Abel, and he was of the City of God. Notice here a parallel between the individual man and the whole race. We all experience as individuals what the Apostle says: “It is not the spiritual that comes first, but the physical, and then the spiritual” (1 Cor 15:46). The fact is that every individual springs from a condemned stock and, because of Adam, must be first cankered and carnal, only later to become sound and spiritual by the process of rebirth in Christ. So, too, with the human race as a whole, as soon as human birth and death began the historical course of the two cities, the first to be born was a citizen of this world and only later came the one who was an alien in the city of men but at home in the City of God. . . .

Now it is recorded of Cain that he built a city, while Abel, as though he were merely a pilgrim on earth, built none. For, the true City of the saints is in heaven, though here on earth it produces citizens in whom it wanders as on a pilgrimage through time looking for the Kingdom of eternity. . . . Now, the city of man was first founded by a fratricide who was moved by envy to kill his brother.¹²

or were it to suggest a freedom which creates moral norms, on the basis of historical contingencies or the diversity of societies and cultures, this sort of alleged autonomy would contradict the Church’s teaching on the truth about man. It would be the death of true freedom: ‘But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’ (Gen 2:17).”

¹² St. Augustine, *City of God* 15.1,5, trans. Gerald Walsh (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958), 324–325, 328.

St. Augustine also gives an allegorical interpretation of Cain and Abel, by which Abel's death prefigures Christ's, and Cain's fratricide prefigures the killing of Christ by the leaders of the Jewish people: "There is a sense in which Cain is a symbol of the Jews who killed Christ the Shepherd of men, as Abel, the shepherd of sheep, is also a prefiguring of Christ."¹³

This typology was very widely used. To the extent that the type of Cain is applied broadly to the whole Jewish people rather than to some of their leaders, such as Caiaphas, it is easy to see that it could lead to anti-Semitic rhetoric and the accusation of Deicide, as history has tragically shown. The Second Vatican Council sought to correct this kind of abuse of typology in *Nostra aetate* 4:

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.

The Deluge

Another marvelous Old Testament story, very rich in typological meaning, is the great Flood, recounted in Genesis 6–9. The waters of the Deluge, which represent Baptism, separate the just from the unjust, and those who are saved through the waters are called to be the founders of a new humanity. Here again, as in all typology, physical and material elements mystically represent spiritual realities, which become intelligible to us only after their revelation through Christ.

The key element in this typology is the ark itself, which is a figure of the Catholic Church, the universal ark of salvation through her sacraments. The fact that the Church alone is the necessary means for salvation is indicated in the fact that the ark was the only means of safety. All men outside the ark were drowned. This is expressed in a Patristic axiom: just as there was no physical salvation outside the ark, so there is no spiritual salvation outside the Church.

In his work *On the Unity of the Church*, St. Cyprian explains how Noah's ark was a figure of the Church as the source of salvation:

You cannot have God for your Father if you no longer have the Church for your mother. If there was any escape for one who was outside the ark of Noah, there will be as much for one who is found to be outside the Church.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., 15.7, p. 335. See also St. Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichean* 12.9.

¹⁴ St. Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church* 6, trans. Maurice Bévenot, in *De lapsis and De Ecclesiae catholicae unitate* (Oxford: Clarendon

Or again:

For just as in the case of that baptism of the world through which the iniquity of old was washed away, if a man was not in the ark of Noah he was unable to be saved by water, so too now, if someone has not been baptized within the Church, he cannot be considered saved by baptism, for the Church is founded upon that unity prescribed by the Lord, after the sacred model of the one ark.¹⁵

Boniface VIII, in his dogmatic bull *Unam sanctam* of 1302, on the necessity of communion with the Church for salvation, writes: "Indeed, in the time of the Deluge, *the ark of Noah prefigured the one Church*. It had one pilot and governor, Noah, and we read that outside of it was drowned all that existed on the face of the earth."¹⁶ Just as later in Egypt, all the firstborn were exterminated except those who were protected by the blood of the paschal lamb, so here all of sinful humanity is drowned, except those protected by the wood of the one ark.

We know that it is possible to be saved without being members of the visible Church, but not without being united to the soul of the Church, which is the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is impossible to be saved without receiving sanctifying grace through the merits of Christ's death on Calvary, through at least an implicit faith in Him and in His Church, and through sincere repentance for sins. The Creed of the People of God, promulgated by Paul VI in 1968, states:

We believe that the Church is necessary for salvation, because Christ, who is the sole mediator and way of salvation, renders Himself present for us in His body which is the Church. But the divine design of salvation embraces all men, and those who without fault on their part do not know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but seek God sincerely, and under the influence of grace endeavor to do His will as recognized through the promptings of their conscience, they, in a number known only to God, can obtain salvation.

The waters of the Deluge themselves represent both the Last Judgment, in which the good are saved and the wicked damned, and Baptism, by which we are saved from condemnation. This figure is spoken of in the First Letter of St. Peter, 3:20–21:

God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved by water. Baptism, which corresponds to this,¹⁷ now saves you, not as a removal of

Press, 1971), 67.

¹⁵ Letter 74.11.2-3, in *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, trans. G.W. Clarke (New York: Newman Press, 1989), vol. 4, p. 77.

¹⁶ DS 870 (D 468).

¹⁷ The Greek word used here is "antitype," which refers to the reality signified by an Old Testament figure or "type."

dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The fact that the Deluge is a figure of Baptism is also brought out in the blessing of water in the liturgy of the Easter Vigil in the Roman Missal:

The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of Baptism, that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness.¹⁸

In his Sermons on the Sacraments given to neophytes, St. Ambrose explains the typology of the Flood:

What is the flood, except the situation in which sin dies, in which the righteous man is preserved to be the seeding-ground for righteousness? So the Lord, when he saw the sins of men multiplying, preserved the righteous man alone with his progeny, and commanded the waters to flow. . . . In the flood, then, all the corruption of the flesh perished, and only the race and the likeness of the righteous remained. Is not this flood baptism, by which all sins are wiped out and only the spirit and the grace of the righteous are revived?¹⁹

There are other typological elements as well. The dove sent out by Noah, which returns with an olive branch, represents the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the neophytes in Baptism, bringing peace to the soul, a peace which the world cannot know or appreciate. Finally, Noah himself, who is a kind of second Adam, the father of all generations succeeding him, is a figure of Christ, the new Adam.

That Noah is a type of Christ is brought out by St. Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho*:

At the flood the mystery of the world's salvation was at work. The just man Noah, together with the other flood personages, namely, his wife, his three sons and their wives, made eight in number thereby symbolizing the eighth day on which our Christ was raised from the dead, that day being always implicitly the first. Christ, the first-born of all creation, has become in a new sense the head of another race, regenerated by Him, through water, through faith, and through the wood which contained the mystery of the cross, just as Noah was saved through the wood of the Ark, carried by the waters of the flood. . . . And I mean here that those who receive preparation through water, faith, and wood escape the judgment of God that is to come.²⁰

For St. Justin, the waters of the Flood are a type both of the Last Judgment and of the waters of Baptism by which we are saved (if we are faithful to the grace of Baptism). As Noah was head of a new humanity through the wood of the ark by which he and his family escaped the judgment on his contemporaries, so Christ is the Head of the new humanity saved from the final judgment by the waters of Baptism, in which we receive sanctifying grace won back for us by Christ on the wood of the Cross.

Justin thus sees Noah's salvation in the Flood as typologically representing three aspects of salvation history: the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, Baptism, and the Last Judgment. De Margerie comments:

Justin portrays this *theologoumenon* as realized on three levels. The first is Christ himself, who has made himself one with the sinful world, bears with it the chastisement for sin, but is spared, in the mystery of his resurrection, to become the principle of a new humanity. The second level is that of the eschatological judgment; and finally baptism, which is a sacramental representation of the judgment. In baptism, sinful man is destroyed and the new man created. One who has undergone this rite will escape the judgment to come.

Here again Justin's typological exegesis carries forward and explicates an exegesis that the New Testament itself had inaugurated. St. Peter (1 Pt 3:18–21) and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews (11:7) had already highlighted the correspondence between flood and baptism.²¹

St. John Chrysostom sees another typological element in the salvation of all the species of animals. As the ark had room for every animal species, so the catholic and spacious ark of Holy Mother Church has room for every nation, culture, and language of mankind. As the ark contained all the variety of life for a "new creation," so the Catholic Church re-establishes the unity of the human family, without sacrificing any of her diversity and complementarity, in the new creation of grace. However, whereas the species of animals were merely preserved in the ark of Noah, the races and nations of men are not only preserved from damnation, but are elevated to a higher and supernatural life in Christ. St. John Chrysostom summarizes the typology of the Flood as follows:

The story of the deluge is a mystery, and its details are figures of things that were to come. The ark is the

18 Roman Missal, Easter Vigil 42: Blessing of Water, cited in CCC 1219.

19 St. Ambrose, *Sermons on the Sacraments (De sacramentis)* 2.1, in Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 109.

20 St. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 138.1–3, translation in De Margerie, *History of Exegesis*, 1:30. For a commentary on the typology in this text of St. Justin, see John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 47–49.

21 De Margerie, *History of Exegesis*, 1:30. See also John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 48: "The biblical account of the Flood is fulfilled, according to Justin, on three levels in Christian existence; *historically* in the life and mission of Jesus Christ; *eschatologically*, insofar as judgment of the world at the time of the Flood is a figure or type of the Last Judgment; and *sacramentally*, since those who die and rise in Christ through baptism participate in 'newness of life' (Rom 6:4)."

Church, Noah is Christ, the dove is the Holy Spirit, the olive branch is the divine charity. Thus as the ark in the midst of the sea protected those who found shelter inside it, so the Church saves all those who had gone astray. However, the ark only protected; the Church does more. For example, the ark received irrational animals and they remained just that, whereas the Church receives unreasonable men, and not only protects them, but transforms them.²²

Let it be observed that this symbolic meaning in no way should be taken to deny or diminish the historical truth of the story of the Deluge. The typological or spiritual meaning builds on the literal historical meaning and presupposes it. Evidence of many kinds supports the historical reality of a spectacular devastating flood that occurred in prehistoric times.²³

There is also a moral sense to the story of the Deluge, which is not hard to understand. Jesus refers to this in Luke 17:26–30. Just as the Flood came upon the world unawares, so the Second Coming will come upon the world when it least expects it (like our own individual particular judgment). Therefore, we must be always prepared.

The Tower of Babel

The building of the tower of Babel, which we should understand as a historical event at the beginning of human civilization, also has a clear moral and allegorical sense. It represents the attempt of man to make a name for himself on earth, to create a technological civilization that rivals God, reaching up to heaven. Such a society has no use for God or heaven. St. Augustine sees it as a perfect symbol of the “earthly city”: a civilization opposed to the City of God (the Kingdom of God), focused on the love of self to the point of contempt for God.²⁴ The City of God, on the contrary, is that civilization built on the love of God up to the point of contempt for self, building a pathway to heaven not through pride in man’s works, but through the divine condescension of the Incarnation and Passion of Christ.

It is deeply fitting that the divine punishment for Babel and its cult of pride was the proliferation of tongues and the dispersal of peoples. By its very nature, the sin of pride divides individuals and societies from one another, because pride seeks self-aggrandizement at the expense of one’s neighbor. Thus Babel is the opposite of the Church, which, beginning with Pentecost, seeks to unite all men into one Body through the bond of supernatural charity, and which unites all tongues in praising God. The task of the Church is to reunite into the Kingdom of God what man has dispersed through pride.

St. Augustine writes:

22 Homily on Lazarus 6, PG 48:1037–38.

23 See Patrick O’Connell, *Science of Today and the Problems of Genesis* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1993).

24 St. Augustine, *City of God* 14.28.

Tongues became different through pride. If pride created differences of tongues, Christ’s humility has joined the differences of tongues together. Now what that tower had dispersed, the Church binds together. From one tongue came many; do not be amazed, pride did this. From many tongues comes one; do not be amazed, love did this. For, although there are different sounds of tongues, in the heart one God is invoked, one peace is kept intact.²⁵

Pentecost represents the overcoming of Babel through the communication of charity in the Church. Although nations still speak different languages, and will doubtless continue to do so until the end of time, in the Church the original unity is reestablished in the unity of faith, hope, and charity. As the Apostles were understood in all languages, so the Church throughout the history of the world seeks to reestablish the primordial unity of mankind united under God in the unity of her worship. It is in this sense that the Second Vatican Council, in *Lumen gentium* 1, speaks of the Church, in Christ, as “a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.” Babel has been overcome by Calvary and Pentecost. Babel, however, as the type of man’s culture of self-exaltation, continues to grow until the end. This age is marked by the ever-increasing warfare of Babel and the Church, the City of man and the City of God. We know, however, how the story ends and who has the last word.

25 St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 6.10.3, trans. John W. Rettig, in St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 1–10 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 139.