

1-1-2012

Seeing Good in a World of Suffering: Incarnation as God's Transforming Vision

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Published version. "Seeing Good in a World of Suffering: Incarnation as God's Transforming Vision," in *Godhead Here in Hiding: Incarnation and the History of Human Suffering*. Eds. Terrence Merrigan and Frederik Glorieux. Leuven, Belgium: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2012: 453-466. [Permalink](#). © 2012 Peeters Publishers. Used with permission.

SEEING GOOD IN A WORLD OF SUFFERING
INCARNATION AS GOD'S TRANSFORMING VISION

INTRODUCTION

At the conclusion of *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor sketches an account of the ironic ways in which pursuit of the high moral aims of modernity often result in humans inflicting unspeakable violence on one another. He contends that “the highest spiritual ideals and aspirations also threaten to lay the most crushing burdens on humankind. The great spiritual visions of human history have also been poisoned chalices, the causes of untold misery and even savagery.”¹ Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky provide paradigmatic explorations of this irony in which “the demands of benevolence can exact a high cost in self-love and self-fulfillment, which may in the end require payment in self-destruction or even in violence.”² Taylor identifies multiple vectors at play in framing the trajectory of this irony. One functions in consequence of human intentions and actions that, even as they engage high moral ideals such as justice or benevolence, may also distort or misdirect them. These have all too often resulted in imparting to human history a thrust deflecting lofty ideals onto paths leading to self-destruction or the infliction of violence on others – an outcome depressingly captured in an expression that, even if never uttered, became archetypically associated with the American war in Vietnam: “We had to destroy the village in order to save it.” Another important vector lies in the often overwhelming power these aspirations have to move us to pursue genuine good: The demands of justice or benevolence become irresistibly imperious to those who unblinkingly recognize their full moral weight. This power enables these ideals to function as overarching “hypergoods” that, without qualification or compromise, must override lesser goods; in consequence they render us capable not only of effecting great good but also of wreaking great destruction upon other goods deemed “lesser” – and thus upon those who value such lesser goods – in the name of higher, more noble aspirations.

1. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 519.

2. *Ibid.*, 518.

Despite his recognition of the destructive power resident in these high moral ideals and our pursuit of them, Taylor does not take “the self-destructive consequences of a spiritual aspiration as a refutation of the aspiration.”³ Even as he acknowledges that “[p]rudence constantly advises us to scale down our hopes and circumscribe our vision,” he also affirms that “we deceive ourselves if we pretend that nothing is denied thereby of our humanity.”⁴ Taylor does not clearly specify in *Sources of the Self* precisely what it is of our humanity that is thereby denied; but the tenor of the final chapter suggests that curbing these aspirations involves denial of elements crucial for constituting our humanity as a fundamentally *spiritual* reality.

An effort to provide the lineaments of what constitutes human beings as spiritual thus seems a major sub-text to Taylor’s work, but he has yet to develop this concern explicitly into an anthropology of the human spirit.⁵ This essay is thus an effort to suggest one direction a “Taylorian” anthropology might take. I will do so in two steps. In the first, I will identify what appear to be important links between two of his affirmations where a concern for reconstituting an account of the spiritual seems thoroughly embedded. One is the affirmation already noted, viz., that the destructive potential that may lie within lofty ideals such as justice and benevolence does not invalidate our aspirations to effect them as fully as we can. These distinctively modern *foci* for moral effort are, in Taylor’s view, genuine gain and we would be diminished in lowering our sights away from them. The second is his affirmation of a specific marker of the human spirit that has emerged in the course of modernity, viz., *the transformation of self that makes possible a “seeing good” that effects the good it sees*. To complete this first step, I then will link these two affirmations to a theology of creation embedded in Taylor’s expressivist account of language. In the light of this account, in which “language

3. *Ibid.*, 519.

4. *Ibid.*, 520.

5. For indications of the content of such sub-text see Philip Rossi, “Divine Transcendence and the ‘Languages of Personal Resonance’: The Work of Charles Taylor as a Resource for Spirituality in an Era of Post-modernity,” *Theology and Conversation*, ed. J. Haers and P. De Mey, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 172 (Leuven: University Press/Peeters, 2004) 783-794; “The Leveling of Meaning: Religious Ethics in the Face of a Culture of Unconcern,” *Ethics in the World Religions*, ed. Nancy Martin and Joseph Runzo (Oxford: One World Press, 2001) 161-174; “The Idiom of Spirit: Discourse, Human Nature, and Otherness. A Response to Philip Clayton and Steven Smith,” *Advents of the Spirit: Orientations in Pneumatology*, ed. D. Lyle Dabney and Bradford Hinze (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2002) 233-239.

realizes man's humanity,"⁶ in that it forms our ways of being in the world, these aspirations function as fundamental markers of a genuine *expansiveness of good* that the human spirit is capable of enacting. The second step – taken with greater hesitation than the first – is then to propose that also embedded in these affirmations is an implicit theology of the Incarnation that resonates with the transformational dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola, dynamics empowered by imaginative participation in the expansiveness of God's "seeing good." I will argue that, within Taylor's expressivist accounts of language, meaning, and the self, a key locus for this theology of Incarnation lies in his understanding of epiphanic art "as a revelation which at the same time defines and completes what it makes manifest."⁷ This theology takes the human enfleshment of God's *logos* to be a *completion* of God's "seeing good" in Creation. In this "epiphanic" rendering of the Incarnation, Jesus manifests, as Incarnate *Logos*, how the "seeing good" effected in Creation is completed in a "seeing good" that, entering fully into human brokenness in all its historical particularity and remaining abidingly mindful of that brokenness, becomes a pattern for our enacting transformative healing.

I

Taylor's most striking discussion of the destructive potential in pursuit of high moral and spiritual aspirations takes place in the final chapter of *Sources of the Self*. Placement of this discussion – at the conclusion of four hundred pages of historically structured exposition of the paths converging on the construction of the modern self – can obscure its connection with the more systematically focused treatment of the concepts of "hypergoods" and "constitutive goods" that preceded the telling of the history.⁸ Two points from the earlier discussion suggest that his account of these human goods holds a sub-text resonant with a theology of Creation in which the goodness of creation is affirmed as sign and manifestation of the Creator's unsurpassable, transcendent goodness. His highlighting of a *transformative* power consequent upon "seeing good," in conjunction with the importance he attaches to *articulacy* about the good as a condition for its recognition, provide two markers referencing this

6. Taylor, "Language and Human Nature," *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 233.

7. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), 419.

8. *Ibid.*, 62-107.

account of good to a theology of Creation.⁹ In particular, articulacy, as the power of one's words to name aright the good that moves us – or as the power to speak the *logos* of the good – offers a link to the theology of the first creation narrative of *Genesis*, in which God's word *is* the power that brings forth the good it utters.

The resonance with *Genesis* is neither accidental nor simply a literary conceit. In an earlier essay, "Language and Human Nature," Taylor sketched the rise, eclipse, and retrieval of an expressive theory of meaning with roots in an "amalgam of Christian theology and Greek philosophy" according to which "God in creating the world gives embodiment to his ideas."¹⁰ Part and parcel of this theory of meaning is understanding creation as a manifestation of God's *logos*: "[God's] creatures manifest his *logos* in embodying it; and they manifest the *logos* as fully as it can be manifest in the creaturely medium. There can be no more fundamental designative relation, precisely because every thing is a sign."¹¹

The eclipse of the expressive theory and its replacement by a designative theory (such as Condillac's) takes place as part of a more extensive shift involving "a polemical rejection of the vision of the world as a meaningful order and its replacement by a conception of the world as objective process."¹² The retrieval of the expressive theory, initially effected by Herder, reaffirms a constitutive power for language, but now exercised in a different mode and by a different agency than it was in the prior theory. The prior expressive account of meaning affirmed ontic power in God's *logos* for bringing into being a *cosmos* that, by its very being as created, thereby signifies its creator. The new expressive account of language is no longer about the creative *logos* of God; it affirms, rather, manifold constitutive powers to the *logos* of human language, of which the most encompassing is that of constituting our way(s) of "being in the world." Humanity becomes the maker of meaning, even as the *cosmos*, now an object of study according to the laws of matter in motion, is thereby "disenchanted" of any signifying function.¹³

9. *Ibid.*, 70-71.

10. Taylor, "Language" (n. 6), 222-223.

11. *Ibid.*, 223.

12. *Ibid.*, 224.

13. Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), notes what such "disenchantment" brings in its wake: "... calling something natural is a way of making it tame ... Natural events are common events. They are very literally insignificant – not representations of something besides themselves, nor signals we need to decode. We are freed from the burden of thinking about them because there is nothing in them to interpret" (236).

What connection do these expressive accounts of meaning and language have with Taylor's depiction of the ironic destructive outcomes of the human engagement with high moral aims of modernity? In particular, what do they have to do with his affirmation that the destructive power within lofty ideals such as justice and benevolence does not thereby invalidate our aspirations to effect them as fully as we can? I believe a link lies in the central importance Taylor attaches to *discerning correctly the conditions which make it possible for human beings to "see good" without illusion*. In contrast to the immanent and naturalist accounts of these aspirations that modernity often provides, Taylor includes acknowledgment of God among the conditions for an illusion-free seeing (and enacting) of their good.¹⁴ The possibility that we can have such an illusion-free discernment of good thus serves as the larger frame for Taylor's account of "the modern identity," which he describes as "a sense of self defined by the powers of disengaged reason as well as of the creative imagination, in the characteristically modern understandings of freedom and dignity and rights, in the ideals of self-fulfillment and expression and in the demands of universal benevolence and justice."¹⁵

As much as this identity resulted in moral gain, so Taylor argues, its forging exacted a price. The field of play for the powers of disengaged reason and of creative imagination, as they have variously intersected and diverged in shaping modern identity, has moved away from "the original unity of the theistic horizon"¹⁶ out of which these powers first emerged. These powers now play against a horizon in which unity of meaning has been deeply fractured; this fracturing has occluded our capacity for recognizing the "moral sources" of the highly demanding values that such a self seeks to express and exhibit. The occlusion is not total. Taylor does not argue that the modern identity utterly blinds us to genuine goods; it provides, rather, the basis for views that are "... too narrow. They find their way through the dilemmas of modernity by invalidating some of the crucial goods in contest."¹⁷ Such "selective blindness" presents us with unpalatable options between "spiritual lobotomy and self-inflicted wounds" – i.e., between lowering, in the name of prudence, our aspirations down to the moral equivalent of a *Realpolitik*, or "living beyond our moral means" in self-loathing or in contempt of others that Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky clearly saw as the corrosive final state of a practical

14. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), 342.

15. *Ibid.*, 503.

16. *Ibid.*, 495-496.

17. *Ibid.*, 502-503.

despair about ever bringing our own conduct – let alone the conduct of others or the dynamics of institutions – into faithful conformity with such exacting moral standards.¹⁸

Taylor indicates that at the root of such blindness is a “stripped down” secular outlook that provides few resources for coherently “seeing good” in the world¹⁹ and that is, at best, skeptical about the possibility and value of human acknowledgment of divine transcendence.²⁰ These two elements are connected; they converge on the issue of “self-affirmation,” which Taylor claims “doesn’t have an exact precedent in earlier times.”²¹ The issue of self-affirmation is not simply about what gives worth to various forms of the “self” of modernity. This issue concerns the very “goodness of being,”²² the goodness of the world that the self engages in its multiple activities. The goodness of the self and of the world have both become contestable, inasmuch as modernity and its aftermath have shattered the theological horizon against which such affirmations of goodness could once confidently be made.²³

In the context of this “crisis of affirmation,” Taylor’s exploration of the possibilities for reviving the human capacity for “seeing good” marks one place where his central theological concerns explicitly emerge in his text. His exploration has two related facets. The first one has already been noted: Possibilities for renewing our human capacity for “seeing good” are located in an expressive understanding of language that we now can index to a human analogue to the transformative power of God’s *logos* of Creation: “What we have in this new issue of affirming the goodness of things is the development of a human analogue to God’s seeing things as good: a seeing which also helps effect what it sees.”²⁴ The second is “a central idea of the Christian tradition, that people are transformed through being loved by God, a love that they mediate to one another.”²⁵ A brief consideration of these two facets – divine and human – of transformative power in the *logos* will provide a transition from Part I’s exploration of Creation as a theological sub-text in Taylor’s account of “the making of the modern identity” to Part II’s consideration

18. *Ibid.*, 520.

19. *Ibid.*, 447-455.

20. *Ibid.*, 519-520.

21. *Ibid.*, 447.

22. *Ibid.*, 448.

23. See the final chapter, “Homeless,” of Neiman, *Evil* (n. 13), 238-328, for a provocative account of the shattered horizon of modernity.

24. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), 449.

25. *Ibid.*, 449.

of the “epiphanic” as locus for a “seeing good” that is effected through the transformative power of the *logos*. I will propose that Taylor’s account of the epiphanic contains elements for a theology of the Incarnation in which the enfleshment of the divine completes the divine “seeing good” of creation by a “seeing good” that transformatively takes into itself the brokenness of the world.

As noted earlier, in “Language and Human Nature” Taylor takes the expressive theory of language set in motion by Herder to mark a significant shift in the locus of creative agency. In the expressive theory of ontic meaning, creative agency was (uniquely) divine; in the new expressive theory of language, creative agency is human. This larger account of the creative power of human expression has implications for “the crisis of affirmation.” It is no longer the case that only God’s seeing good brings about the good it sees: “... the world’s being good may now be seen as not entirely independent of our seeing it and showing it as good, at least as far as the world of humans is concerned.”²⁶ Such “seeing good,” moreover, must be such as to encompass ourselves as well as the things of the world: “What is new is the modern sense of the place and power of the creative imagination. This is now an integral part of the goodness of things, and hence the transformation of our stance and thus our outlook helps bring about the truth it reveals.”²⁷

On Taylor’s account there is thus a “double-sidedness” to the transformative power of “seeing good”: The one seeing and the good that is seen are mutually implicated in the transformation effected in the “seeing.” Acknowledgment of the possibility of such mutual transformation, he argues, is not peculiarly modern: “In fact, the notion of a transformation of our stance towards the world whereby our vision of it is changed has traditionally been connected with the notion of grace.”²⁸ That notion of grace, however, was set in a background of a commonly shared order, “unmediated by our powers of creative articulation,” that provided “a tableau of the spiritual significance of things.”²⁹ Within the “fractured horizons” of modern and post-modern cultures, by contrast, we live in a context “in which a publicly accessible cosmic order of meanings is an impossibility.”³⁰ In consequence, that earlier notion of grace has diminished power to function effectively as a publicly recognized trope for the transforming power of “seeing good.”

26. *Ibid.*, 448.

27. *Ibid.*, 449.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, 427.

30. *Ibid.*, 512.

Given the theological concerns within Taylor's account, he can hardly be advocating that we jettison earlier notions of grace. He is proposing, instead, an enrichment of the notion of grace that takes into account a distinctive modality for recognition of grace that has emerged in modernity. He identifies this modality in terms of "languages of personal resonance" that engage "the search for moral sources *outside* the subject through languages that resonate *within* him or her, the grasping of an order which is inseparably indexed to a personal vision."³¹ These languages of personal resonance offer a specific marker of the human spirit emergent from modernity, viz., an imaginative transformation of our own possibilities for "seeing good" *in* ourselves that then transforms *all* that we see as good.

Even as Taylor emphasizes the distinctively modern tonality of such "languages of personal resonance" as coming from within, he acknowledges that their power as transformative does not come simply from within ourselves: Grace – a gift beyond ourselves – and not Pelagian self-transformation effects this new "seeing": "Loving the world and ourselves is in a sense a miracle, in the face of all the evil and degradation that it and we contain."³² The insight is from John's gospel, but the modern tonality is Dostoyevsky's, who

brings together here a central idea of the Christian tradition, especially evident in the Gospel of John, that people are transformed through being loved by God, a love that they mediate to one another, on the one hand, with the modern notion of a subject who can help to bring on transfiguration through the stance he takes to himself and the world, on the other.³³

Taylor's view harkens to a remark from his earlier discussion of hypergoods that touches upon the transformation that love has upon our "seeing": "On a Christian view, sanctification involves our sharing to some degree God's love (*agape*) for the world, and this transforms how we see things and what else we long for or think important."³⁴ This remark is significant in that it suggests a strategy for locating the theology of Incarnation at work in Taylor's project. In manifesting Taylor's concern "to bring the air back again to the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit,"³⁵ this remark echoes the transformational dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola. These dynamics move from the recognition (in

31. *Ibid.*, 510.

32. *Ibid.*, 452.

33. *Ibid.*, 452.

34. *Ibid.*, 70; emphasis mine.

35. *Ibid.*, 520.

the First Week³⁶) that, even in one's sinful human condition, one is abidingly loved by God to the transformation of one's seeing (in the final exercise, the *contemplatio ad amorem*³⁷) into an optic of "finding God in all things."

A fundamental element in the Ignatian dynamics of transformation is signaled in the recurring focus the *Spiritual Exercises* has upon discernment in decisions that give order to one's "way of life."³⁸ One could argue – but that is not a task I undertake here – that this element is remarkably anticipatory of that specific marker of the human spirit that Taylor sees emerging in modernity, viz., a *self-involving transformation of self that makes possible a "seeing good" that effects the good it sees*. Self-involvement in the transformation is key: Ignatius is particularly clear that these exercises assist one in making *one's own* discovery of the inner workings of God's spirit. Freedom – the freedom of God's spirit and the freedom of the one making the exercises – are of paramount concern for Ignatius. In this he is prescient about the freedom that is a major theme of modernity, though with a crucial difference: Ignatius does not share a typically modern presupposition that God's freedom and human freedom are inevitably pitted against one another in a zero-sum game.

Locating Taylor's theological sub-text within the context of the dynamics of the *Spiritual Exercises* will thus offer a useful way for noting important consequences that his account of the transformative power of "seeing good" has for the issue framing this essay: The ironic ways in which the pursuit of the high moral aims of modernity have resulted in humans inflicting unspeakable violence on one another. It poses the question of how might we begin to "see good" in ways that *resist* the dynamics of destruction that seem to emerge even from high-minded pursuit of the hypergoods of modernity. Is there a way of "seeing good" that itself might empower such resistance and, if there is, what makes such a seeing possible? It is obvious that Taylor does not think that such resistance can effectively come from narrowing and lowering our moral and spiritual sights but from making them higher and more expansive. But is this possible without investing these loftier demands upon ourselves with the same potential for destruction that has littered the landscape of modernity and its aftermath with deadened souls and broken bodies?

36. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1954) # 60 (30). Citations provide paragraph number first, page numbers in parenthesis.

37. *Exercises*, # 230-237 (101-103).

38. *Exercises*, #163-189 (68-78).

An initial answer to these questions lies, I believe, in Taylor's notion of the "epiphanic" as a mode of the transformative power of language. I will use this notion to explore, in Part II, how there can be a "seeing good" that has an *expansiveness that empowers resistance to violence*. This exploration will focus on a particular presentation of a "seeing good" that manifests such empowering expansiveness: The Incarnation as rendered by St. Ignatius Loyola in the meditation opening the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises*.³⁹

II

Taylor's account of the transformative power of the "epiphanic" provides an apt interpretive focus for the meditation on the Incarnation, precisely as an optic highlighting how this exercise exhibits the expansiveness of God's "seeing good." Within the overall movement of the *Spiritual Exercises*, this meditation encourages a participation in a Trinitarian "seeing" of the human enfleshment of God. By imaginatively taking part in "God's seeing" of the full scope of human conduct in the world, one is disposing oneself for God's grace to effect the transformation described by Taylor's remark about sanctification: As I allow my seeing of the world to be informed by this *agape* filled "seeing good" of God's, I become open to being transformed in and by that seeing. My seeing is to *become* the "seeing good" of the Incarnation, a "seeing good" that responds with *agape* to the broken human condition that God sees with utter clarity. This seeing is astonishingly more expansive than any of which I am humanly capable: God, seeing a world in which human beings wreak horrific destruction on themselves and on one another, enacts, in that seeing, a surpassing good for and in that world – precisely by fully entering into it. As "epiphanic," the Incarnation is God's "seeing good" that effects full entrance of the divine into human brokenness in all its historical particularity, that remains abidingly mindful of that brokenness, and in that enduring mindfulness effects transformative healing. The "seeing good" of the Ignatian meditation on God's Incarnation well fits Taylor's definition of epiphanic art: "... a revelation which at the same time defines and completes what it makes manifest."⁴⁰

Crucial to my argument, moreover, is that these dynamics of Ignatian spirituality – of which this meditation is one exemplar – recognize that the

39. *Exercises*, #101-109 (49-51).

40. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), 419.

full expansiveness of good of which the graced human spirit is capable of enacting has its source in the unsurpassable expansiveness of good effected in God's creating, redeeming and sanctifying "seeing." The expansiveness of God's "seeing good" in Creation is exceeded in God's "seeing good" a world in need of the enfleshment of God for its redemption, a world that by God's enfleshment becomes a dwelling place for the transforming activity of the Spirit. The *Exercises* begin with a "seeing" of all creation through "The First Principle and Foundation,"⁴¹ an optic of God's salvific purposes for humankind. They continue through the optic of God incarnate as salvation is enacted in the ministry, passion and resurrection of Jesus. They conclude through the pneumatological optic of God's enacted love operative through all creation, marked by images of God's abundantly active love in the *contemplatio ad amorem*.⁴²

This Trinitarian pattern of divine expansiveness provides conditions for transforming our human seeing and enactment of good. This seems consonant with Taylor's view that only in virtue of such a transformation – i.e., one that enables us genuinely to embrace the full range of our good and the good of the world – will we be able to enact in full, without destruction and violence, the high moral aims of justice and benevolence modernity has set before us.⁴³ He maintains that, in the absence of such transformation, affirmation of the good of human dignity is unlikely to be robust enough to empower effective, enduring resistance to the temptation to inflict – in the name of what is good, true, and even holy – individual, collective, and systemic violence upon one another:

We have to search for a way in which our strongest aspirations towards hypergoods do not exact a price of self-mutilation. I believe that such a reconciliation is possible; but its essential condition is that we enable ourselves to *recognize the goods to which we cannot but hold allegiance in their full range*.⁴⁴

His discussion of the "crisis of affirmation" refines this remark in two important ways. First, he indicates that "enabling ourselves" to recognize

41. *Exercises*, #23 (12).

42. *Exercises*, # 230-237 (101-103). The *Spiritual Exercises* does not include a meditation on Pentecost. This might appear as inexplicable neglect of the Spirit by Ignatius, for whom the mystery of the Trinity was so formative. My proposal that the *contemplatio ad amorem* is a key locus in the *Spiritual Exercises* for acknowledging the work of the Spirit is offered as a first step in recognizing the pneumatological current running deeply in the *Exercises*, though the Holy Spirit is rarely named in the text.

43. Taylor is not arguing for an exclusively Christian configuration to such transformation. See Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. James L. Heft (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 19-25.

44. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), 106; emphasis mine.

the full range of human goods is not something we can accomplish all by ourselves. In theological terms, what empowers us to “enable ourselves” to recognize these goods in their full range is a prior operation of grace upon us. Second, there is a close connection between appropriate self-affirmation, on the one hand, and inclusive affirmation of the full good of the world, in both its human and non-human dimensions, on the other. Narrowing or undermining of one side of this affirmation results in narrowing or undermining the other.⁴⁵ We have placed ourselves in a double-bind in the course of modernity and its aftermath by occluding our vision of the robust moral sources that make possible a mutually enriching, and comprehensive affirmation of *both* our own worth and the worth of the world. Out of this double-bind emerge many of the contentions from which we pit good against good even to the point of violence, since robust affirmation on either side does not guarantee effective enactment of good. It may even lead to its opposite:

A lofty humanism posits high standards of self-worth and a magnificent goal to strive toward. It inspires enterprises of great moment. But by this very token it encourages force, despotism, tutelage, ultimately contempt, and a certain ruthlessness in shaping refractory human material.⁴⁶

Taylor takes effective response to this double-bind to lie “somewhere in the turn to transcendence – that is, through the full hearted love of some good beyond life,” which he also sees as the “only way to escape the draw to violence” entangled in the imperious demands of hyper-goods.⁴⁷ These affirmations raise many issues both within and beyond the purview of this essay; of the directly relevant issues, space allows only for treatment of one, but I believe it offers an appropriate locus to conclude a discussion aimed at exploring an anthropology of the human spirit from resources in Taylor’s work. This issue can be framed in Taylor’s own words: “acknowledging the transcendent means being called to a change of identity.”⁴⁸ With respect to the Incarnation as presented in the *Spiritual Exercises*, this suggests that we attend to the dynamics of the transformation of identity that are “epiphatically” encountered in the “seeing good” displayed in the meditation by asking two questions: First, what transformation of identity is effected by the [Triune] divine “seeing” that “look[s] down upon the whole expanse or circuit of all the earth, filled with human beings [and] ... see[s] that all are going down to

45. He gives this further development in *Catholic Modernity*, 30-37.

46. Taylor, *Catholic Modernity* (n. 43), 33.

47. *Ibid.*, 28-29.

48. *Ibid.*, 21.

hell” and, in and from that “seeing,” decrees that “the Second Person should become man to save the human race”?⁴⁹ Second, how might such a transformation of identity empower effective resistance to the destructive violence that has marked human engagement with high moral aims of modernity?

Let me close with three brief, hesitant suggestions, two to the first question, one to the second: Might we entertain the possibility that the first transformation effected by this seeing is nothing less than a transformation of the divine that, in Christian theology, has been articulated as the doctrine of the Incarnation? The human enfleshment of God’s *logos* becomes the *completion* of God’s “seeing good” in Creation in a way radically unforeseeable from the perspective of any created “seeing.” The “event” of Incarnation is radical in the manner it effects the good that its seeing brings to be. The enfleshment of God, a graciousness and gratuity utterly beyond our comprehension, is *an unforeseeable completion of the Godself* by God’s free self-binding to humanity and creation in their brokenness. This radicality, captured in the Pauline image of *kenosis*, has its transformative impact for us articulated in an insight Taylor attributes to Dostoyevsky: “Accepting to be part of the world contributes to healing it.”⁵⁰

The Dostoyevskian insight leads to a less hesitant suggestion about a second transformation of identity effected in the “seeing” presented in the meditation on the Incarnation. This second transformation is effected in the person making the Exercises. The meditation offers the invitation to transform our capacity for “seeing good” by participating in the Incarnation as the completion of God’s “seeing good” in creation. To participate in this divine seeing is to allow it to become a power for *enacting that incarnational seeing in the manner of one’s own life*. This is signaled in the “Third Prelude” that specifies what is to be desired in all the contemplations of Jesus’ life and ministry in the second week: “An intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and *follow Him more closely*.”⁵¹ The crucial dynamics of this transformation are not matters of mere external imitation, but of inner appropriation resonant with the Pauline exhortation in Philippians 2:5 preceding the kenotic hymn: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

49. *Exercises*, # 102 (49).

50. Taylor, *Sources* (n. 1), 454.

51. *Exercises*, # 104 (49); emphasis mine.

Both these suggestions offer a direction for response to the third question: The Incarnation is God's "seeing good" that in Jesus effects God's own enfleshed resistance to all destructive violence – beginning with that inflicted on Abel by his brother Cain – done in the name of human aspirations. The transformation to which we are invited by God's "accepting to be part of the world" – of the very world in which such violence takes place – is to let God's seeing similarly transform us so that we, who are creatures of enfleshed spirit, enact the resistance to violence that the enfleshed God enacted for us.

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