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The Grace that creates Nature, the Grace that renews Nature: Gilbert of La Porrée and the Victorines on Natural Law

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Abstract. Natural law is a crucial subject in the twelfth-century debates among Roman and canon lawyers, but also among the exegetes and theologians. Starting from two verses of Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Rm 1:18-20 and 2:13-14), the masters debated the natural capability of human being to achieve a moral knowledge and the features of the universal moral principle, that is the *lex naturalis*, which natural reason can understand. Through the analysis of Gilbert of La Porrée's *Glossa in epistolas Beati Pauli* (ca. 1130) and of Ps. Hugh of St. Victor's *Quaestiones in epistolas Beati Pauli* (ca. 1160), this essay examines the exegetical developments in the Parisian milieu of the mid-twelfth century. It shows how the doctrinal positions of Gilbert and the Ps. Hugh stand in their intellectual landscape and which influence they have in the development of the theological debate on natural law.

Keywords. Natural law, medieval theology, medieval exegesis.

INTRODUCTION

The twelfth-century legal culture is marked by an increasing interest for the theories of natural law: both Roman and canon lawyers develop more and more detailed analysis of this idea, also by connecting it to the Roman legal tradition and the canons of the Church¹. In the writings of the Bolognese lawyers, as well as in Gratian's *Concordia discordantium canonum*, the *lex naturalis* is the subject of a long doctrinal debate which produces a plural understanding of this theory according to two major perspectives. Gratian clearly summarizes these two accounts of natural law in the opening

¹ Kenneth Pennington is going to analyse this point starting from the study of a series of relevant notes and glosses to an early twelfth-century unplished legal text. I deeply thank professor Pennington for sharing the results of his forthcoming study which will appear on the *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law* in 2019.

lines of his treaty on law, at the very beginning of the *Concordia*. On the one hand, standing on the basis of the Roman legal tradition, natural law is presented as a rule which is consistent with the order of nature, according to the principle: «Natural law is common to all nations because it exists everywhere through natural instinct, not because of any enactment»². On the other hand, considering the tradition of canons and the patristic heritage, natural law is identified with the moral and legal prescriptions of the Scripture which are exemplified in the two versions of the so-called “golden rule”. Gratian explains: «The human race is ruled by two things, namely, natural law and usages. Natural law is what is contained in the Law and the Gospel. By it, each person is commanded to do the others what he wants done to himself and prohibited from inflicting on others what he does not want done to himself. So Christ said in the Gospel: “Whatever you want men to do to you, do so to them. This indeed is the Law and the Prophets” (Matth. 7:12)»³.

Scholars have devoted a considerable attention to these legal discussions, suggesting the idea that in 12th century natural law was mainly a matter of canonists and legists⁴. On the contrary, natural law is one of the major crosscutting issues in the so-called “Renaissance of the 12th century”, drawing the interest of exegetes and theologians⁵. In fact, the twelfth-century authors deal with the *lex naturalis* not only on the basis of the very first lines

of Justinian’s *Digest* or of the canons and Patristic sources that Gratian collects. Within a cultural landscape shaped on the study and understanding of the Bible, natural law represents a subject matter largely present in the exegetical activities of the period. More in detail, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans refers to the existence of a law which every human being is able to know by nature, according to the capability of human reason to understand the divine invisible things through the visible created ones. Rm 1:17-20 and mainly Rm 2:13-14 become two *loci* of the twelfth-century theological discourse, from Abelard and the masters of Laon to Stephen Langton and the very first theologians of the university of Paris in the early 13th century⁶.

Among the vast twelfth-century theological literature, largely still unpublished, some writings have an outstanding relevance in the development of the exegesis of the Pauline verses which concern natural law. Gilbert of La Porrée, with his gloss to St. Paul’s Epistles, significantly develops the exegesis of Anselm and Raoul of Laon, contributing to define the content of the so-called *Glossa ordinaria* also on the Epistle to the Romans⁷. Gilbert’s text dates to the 1130s and has been followed by the great commentaries of Robert of Melun and Peter Lombard, but it exercised a relevant influence in the exegesis of Paul’s Epistles, particularly on doctrinal issues such as natural law. Thirty years after Gilbert of La Porrée’s *Glossa*, a master of the abbey of St. Victor produced a commentary by questions where he re-examined the issue of natural law⁸. The Ps. Hugh of St. Vic-

² Gratian [1879]: 2 (Gratian [1993]: 6).

³ Gratian (1879): 1 (Gratian [1993]: 3).

⁴ See Bloom (1983); Tierney (1997); Brett (1997); Finnis (2011²), Oakley (2005); Pennington (2011); Tierney (2014). A general overview on the twelfth-century legal discourse on natural law is offered by Weigand (1967), while Cortese (1962-1964) offers a placement of the discourse on natural law within the whole field of the Medieval legal culture. See also Padovani (1997) and Grossi (2011). For a general survey on the twentieth-century historiography on medieval natural law see Saccenti (2016).

⁵ See Haskins (1927); Benson, Constable (1982); Morpurgo (2000); Gregory (2007). For the relevance of the term *natura* in the development of the technical language of theology see Valente (2008): *ad indicem*.

⁶ See Evans [1982]; Marenbon [1992]; Saccenti [2018 forthcoming].

⁷ See Catalani (1997); Simon (1957); Stegmüller (1950): 346 n. 2515. In the following pages Gilbert’s text is quoted from the ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 12028 (P).

⁸ See Denifle (1905): 65-74; Landgraf (1932): 171-184; Landgraf (1936); Martin (1938): xli-xlvi; Stegmüller (1951): n. 3831-44 (vol. 3: 184); Landgraf (1946-47): 186-200; Glorieux (1952); Evans (1982). The text is edited in Migne (1879): vol. 175, cols. 431-634. The latin text has been confronted with the ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 14807 (P1).

tor is clearly aware of Robert's and Lombard's exegesis, as well as of the contents of Gilbert's gloss, but at the same time he places himself in the tradition that goes back to Hugh of St. Victor, elaborating an original perspective on the very theological value of Paul's reference to the capability of every human being to do «by nature those things that are of the law» (Rm 2:14)⁹.

The present contribution focuses on these two texts, considering their placement within the twelfth-century theological debate and analysing their accounts on the issue of natural law. More in detail, this study examines the contents of Gilbert's and the Ps. Hugh's exegesis of Rm 1:17-25 and Rm 2:13-14, showing the semantic value they give to key terms such as *natura* and *lex*. This analysis allows an evaluation of the impact of these two text in the development of the theological discussion concerning natural law.

GILBERT OF LA PORRÉE'S GLOSSA IN EPISTOLAS BEATI PAULI

Gilbert of La Porrée's *Glossa in epistolas Beati Pauli* is a major work in the literary production of the master: the contemporaries place it beside the *opuscola* on Boethius and the commentary on the Psalms, as one of the most clear exposition of the master's theology. Even if Gerhoch of Raichersberg considers Gilbert's *Glossa* as a problematic text, it becomes a major point of reference for the following development of the exegesis of Paul's Epistles¹⁰.

The master composed his gloss to St. Paul's Epistles in the 1130s, assuming a specific understanding of the Pauline corpus. In the prologue which precedes the commentary to the Epistle to the Romans, Gilbert notes that the literary genre of the *epistolae* in the New Testament parallels the genre of the prophetic books in the Old Testament: these latter recall the precepts, the promises,

and the sacraments concerning the fleshly things, while authors of the epistles enlight the precepts, promises, and sacraments concerning the spiritual realities. Considering more closely the contents of the Epistle to the Romans, Gilbert notes that the Apostle aims at creating the appropriate framework to overcome the polemics between the Jews and the Gentiles thanks to a doctrinal shift from the accomplishment of the Law to the faith in Christ¹¹. Thus, the discussion on natural law rests upon the careful analysis of Paul's text and focuses on two issues: the value of the term "nature" and the meaning of the lemma "natural law".

Gilbert explains that in the Epistle to the Romans the word *natura* does not indicate the created things, that is the physical order of the creation, but the natural capability to know which is proper of every human being. Considering Rm 1:18-20, the master explains that if the Jews have a knowledge of God through the revelation, the Gentiles can achieve this knowledge through the creation. Paul explains: «for the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; his eternal power also, and divinity: so that

¹¹ Gilbert of La Porrée, in Simon (1957): 55-56: «Sicut Prophetæ post Legem, sic et Apostoli post Euangelium recte scripserunt, ut, quemadmodum illi ad carnalia Legis, sic et isti ad Euangelii spiritualia praecepta et promissa et sacramenta uocantes, fidem sacramentum, spem promissorum et praeceptorum oboedientiam commendaret et de cetero contra rediuiua uitia uel haereses emersuras consulerent. Vnde et Apostolus, scribens Romanos, quibus quidam ex Iudaeis Christo credentes tradiderant ut Christum profitentes Legem seruarent, id omnino agit ut a Lege eos tollat et in sola fide Christi constituat, in qua tamen utrique inter se inuicem altercantes sese despiciebant et merita iactabant. Nam qui uenerant ex Iudaeis, propter patres, a quibus originem duxerant, et propter Legem, quam inter ceteras gentes soli acceperant, his qui uenerant ex Gentibus hactenus idolatriæ deditis se praeferabant et obseruantia Legis se fidei gratiam meruisse dicebant. E contra Gentiles mortem Christi improperebant Iudaeis simulque protestabant se minime coluisse idola, si Legem et Prohetarum oracula habuissent. Humilians igitur utrosque, Apostolus genus humanum ab initio arguit, Gentiles a naturali ratione, Iudaeos a Lege ostendens exorbitasse».

⁹ The Biblical quotations in the article are taken form the Douay-Rheims Bible, accessible on-line at <http://biblehub.com>.

¹⁰ Catalani [1997]: 55-56; Simon [1957]: 51-52.

they are inexcusable» (Rm 1:20). According to Gilbert, the Apostle notes here that the Gentiles made a wrong use of the possibility to know God, the invisible, through the visible things, degenerating into idolatry, that is an unpius and inappropriate identification of the divine features with those of the created things. Beside this aspect, he explains that this knowledge of God depends not on the direct revelation and the Scripture, but on created things. The ancient and noble philosophers searched this knowledge through natural reason, being able to know the artifex from the art. Divine grace actively supports natural reason in achieving this kind of knowledge, and God reveals himself to the philosophers through the species of his handiworks¹². In Gilbert's opinion, natural reason, considering the visible things as referring to the invisible reality of God, is able to have different perspective to know God, and more precisely to understand different aspects of God. He explains: «[Paul] says invisible things in the plural because, even if God does not consist of diversity, however the way we know him through created things is multiple, as that he is immense by quantity, eternal by the permanence of the elements»¹³.

Gilbert concludes that natural reason allows human beings to know God but also to understand his trinitarian nature: by the invisible things they knew the Father, by the unity of creation the Son, and by the divinity the Holy Spirit. Thus, by the created things the pagan philosophers have adequate and proper information concerning «that highest Trinity who is God». For this reason they are morally responsible of the evil they make: they

do not properly glorify and serve God with their moral life, even if by natural reason they know Him as the one principle and understand that all things are created by the Word¹⁴.

Natural reason has a crucial role in moral life, since it provides every human being with the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, regardless of being Jew or Gentile. Nor the former nor the latter can allage their ignorance of the very contents of laws and their obligations to justify themselves: if the Jew has a knowledge of the divine law by the written law, the Gentile has such a knowledge by his natural reason. Referring to Rm 2:14, Gilbert notes:

For when the Gentiles. [Paul] said that the gentile damns himself if he does evil and justifies himself if he does good. But since he does not have the law, as if he would not know what is good and what is evil, it seems that he has to be considered as neutral. On this point the Glossa on the Apostle says: "even if they have not the written law, they have natural law by which they are aware of good and evil", as if the lawgivers actually were justified. In fact, the Gentiles, too, who have not the written law, do by nature those things that are of the law, that is: they discriminate by natural reason what has to be done and what not, (what the law would do), not having such a law, that is written law. And doing this, they are a law to themselves, which means they are valid to themselves as law, as if, by doing the deeds of the law, they were showing what is written, that is what is steadily fixed in their hearts. Every work of the law is good, but mainly the faith, which someone offers to God by natural judgment, that, even acts beyond what the law commands, that is believes in Christ even without the letter of the law¹⁵.

¹² Gilbert of La Porrée, *P*: 4v: «Manifestum est enim non dico illis sed in illis, quia nobiles philosophi per naturalem rationem quesierunt et omnium rerum speciem tanquam uoce sibi respondente, ex arte artificem cognouerunt. Nec defuit diuinum auxilium, sine quo ratio nichil cognosceret. Deinde enim manifestauit uel reuelauit Illis in operum suorum speciem se demonstrans».

¹³ Gilbert of La Porrée, *P*: 4v: «Pluraliter dici inuisibilia quia quamuis deus ex diuersitate non constet, nobis tamen eum per ea que facta sunt cognoscendi, modus est multiplex sicut quod immensus ex quantitate, eternus ex perpetuitate elementorum».

¹⁴ Gilbert of La Porrée, *P*: 4v: «Nota, per inuisibilia patrem, per unitatem filium per diuinitatem spiritum sanctum intelligi. Sic igitur per ea que facta sunt summe illius trinitatis que deus est indicia gentiles philosophi habuerunt ita ut sint iexcusabiles de hoc, quia scilicet, cum per naturalem rationem cognouissent deum usque a Deo ut faterentur unum esse principium ex quo omnia, et eadem omnia esse facta per uerbum. *Non tamen sunt deum glorificauerit bene uiuendo aut colendo*».

¹⁵ Gilbert of La Porrée, *P*: 8v: «*Cum enim. Dixit gentilem dampnari si male operetur, iustificari si bene. Sed cum legem non habeat, quasi nesciat quid bonum sit et*

Assuming this interpretation of the Pauline verse, Gilbert deals with a crucial question: in which way God's promise to write his laws in the hearts of his people Israel is new with respect to the contents of the Old Testament, since the Gentiles already have this same law written in their hearts by nature? And which is the role of grace considering that people knows the law by nature? The master notes that the basic difference between Old and New Testament is that while in the former the law is written in tablets, in the latter it is written in the hearts. The fact that for the Jews the law is written in the tablets does not prevent the value of writing the law in the hearts of the people; similarly, the fact that the Gentiles already have the law written in their hearts by nature does not prevent the value of writing this law. Gilbert explains that both the Jews and the Gentiles, inasmuch as they are human beings, have the faculty of natural reason by which they understand and do what is right. This is the consequence of being created "in the image of God", that is to have the image of God impressed in the heart since the moment of creation. Such an image is certainly affected by worldly realities and cupidity which makes it blind, but it can never be deleted¹⁶. Thus natural reason, that is the capability to understand good and evil, endures

quid malum, uidetur neutrum sibi debere imputari. Circa quod Apostolus: "etsi non habent scriptam legem habent naturalem qua intelligunt quid sit bonum et quid malum", quasi uere factores iustificabuntur. *Nam et gentes que legem scriptam non habent que legis sunt naturaliter faciunt*, idest naturali ratione facienda et non facienda discernunt quod lex faceret, non tamen *habentes legem huiusmodi*, hoc est scriptam. Et cum hoc faciunt *ipsi sibi sunt lex*, idest ualent sibi quod lex, *quasi opus legis* faciendo ostendunt illud scriptum, idest firmiter fixum in cordibus suis. Opus legis quelibet bona, sed maxime fides quam naturali iudicio quis exhibet deo, cumque mandat lex ultra facit, idest in Christum sine legis littera».

¹⁶ Gilbert of La Porrée, P: 9r: «Siue gentes siue iudei homines sunt quibus, Deo per gratiam solam donante tanquam scribente, uis illa naturalis rationis inest qua legitimum aliquid animal rationale et sentit et facit. Hec est enim imago Dei ipsis hominum cordibus, cum crearentur inpressa que, etsi terrenorum affectuum est labe detrita et cupiditate cecata, non tamen omnino deleta est».

also in the impious, who is still capable of good actions. Accordingly, St. Paul's words mean that the Gentiles do by nature those things that are of the law not because grace operates in substitution of nature: the name "nature" does not involve the denial of grace, but rather grace repairs nature. In fact, grace cures the vice which affects nature and in doing so it repairs nature.

On this basis, Gilbert of La Porrée notes that St. Paul uses the lemma "natural law" to define the human capability to understand by nature the divine laws which are written in people's heart since their creation. Assuming a clearly theological perspective that rests upon the letter of the Epistle to the Romans, the master considers natural law as something which concerns human reason. More precisely, natural law is the law that God has written in the heart of every created human being and that can be understood through "natural reason", that is the faculty which represents the "image" of God present and unerasable in humankind. Accordingly, Gilbert can conclude that both Jews and Gentiles have the divine laws written in their hearts by the grace of creation and renovation¹⁷.

Gilbert's account on natural law directly influences the content of the *Glossa ordinaria*, where Rm 2:13-14 is interpreted as a statement concerning the aptitude to act in accordance with God's requirements which is a natural endowment of humankind, depending on its being created "in the image of God". The *Glossa* notes:

For when the Gentiles. In fact, he [Paul] said that the gentile is damned for doing evil and saved for doing good. But if, as it were, he has no law and no knowledge of good and evil, it might seem that neither can be imputed to him. On the contrary, the Apostle states that the gentile does have the natural law even

¹⁷ Gilbert of La Porrée, P: 9r: «Naturaliter fiunt que legis sunt, non quod sicut dictum est per nature nomen negata sit gratia, sed per gratiam potius reparata natura. Quia namque uicium est circa naturam recte uicium gratia sanans intelligitur reparare naturam. Vnde non modo iudei sed etiam gentiles et scriptas per gratiam creationis et renouationis et naturaliter habent leges diuinas in cordibus suis».

though he lacks the written law, for he understands and is aware of good and evil. Thus, we are to believe that his acts are good or evil and that he is saved or damned deservedly. His doing good and being saved occur only thanks to the grace and faith that renew the natural image of God in man, made sluggish by longstanding vice. Without this renewal he would do evil and be damned, accused of his unnatural vices by his own conscience and, in any case, by the grace that heals what opposes nature. The image in the human soul is not so completely destroyed by the stain of worldly affections that no lineaments remain of its attributes; the image of God impressed in the human soul as its creation is not completely lost. Therefore, once vice is healed by grace, the things of the law happen by nature. Not because by saying nature grace is discarded; rather because graces repairs nature. And, because the inner man is renewed with this grace, the law of justice is rewritten, deleting the guilt of sin¹⁸.

A NEW THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS: THE QUAESTIONES IN EPISTOLAS PAULI

Gilbert of La Porrée's analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans fixes some specific features of the theological account of natural law. Firstly

¹⁸ *Glossa ordinaria* (1992): IV: 1079vb: «Cum enim gentes. Cum enim dixerat gentilem damnari si male operaretur saluari si bene, sed cum legem non habeat, quasi nesciat quid sit bonum quidve malum, videretur sibi neutrum debere imputari. Contra Apostolus, etsi non habeat scriptam legem habet naturalem, quia intelligit et sibi conscius est quid sit bonum et quid sit malum. Et ideo credendus et bene uel male operari, et merito saluari uel damnari. Bene operari dico et saluari quod non est, nisi per gratiam et fidem que renouat naturalem imaginem Dei in homine ex uitio et uetustate sopitam sine qua renouatione male operatur, et damnatur accusante eum conscientia uitum quippe contra naturam est quod utique sanat gratia. Non enim usque adeo in humana anima ymago terrenorum affectuum labe detrita est ut nulla in ea lineamenta remanserint. Non omnino deletum est quod ibi per ymaginem Dei cum crearetur impressum est. Proinde uitio sanato per gratiam naturaliter fiunt ea que legis sunt. Non quod per nature nomen negata sit gratia, sed potius per gratiam reparata natura, qua gratia interiori homine renouato, lex iustitie rescribitur quam delebat culpa».

natural law is the human capability to understand the divine laws and is written in our heart by God. Secondly, natural law it is the form that divine law assumes when is written in the heart of people. Thirdly, natural law is at the crossroad between nature and grace: while sins and cupidity affect human nature, diffiguring the image of God, divine grace creates human nature and also recreates it, repairing the damages and healing the wounds of sins.

Hugh of St. Victor plainly shares these three features, stressing the relevance of a temporal understanding of "natural law". In his *Didascalicon* he suggests to consider this law within the theological dynamics of creation and re-creation and argues that the expression *lex naturalis* properly designates the law written in the heart of human beings at the moment of their creation. It is thus the denomination of a specific moment in the history of salvation, which is followed by the age of written law (*lex scripta*), that is the law that God gave to Moses, aiming to overcome the consequences of the original sin. Finally, the third age of the law of grace (*lex gratiae*), accomplishes this theological process of restoration of the original moral integrity of human being¹⁹. Hugh explains that the two statements of the so-called "golden rule", namely Tobias 4:15 and Matthew 7:12, clearly summarize the content of natural law, while the written law conforms this same content to the different situations and contingencies through the series of precepts and rules. Finally, the law of the grace reconsiders the moral life from a comprehensive and perfect perspective.

Hugh's analysis remains a crucial point of reference among the exegetes and theologians of St.

¹⁹ Hugh of St. Victor, in Migne (1879): 343B: «Post fidem de sacramentis fidei tractare debemus. Sacramenta ab initio ad restaurationem et curationem hominis instituta sunt; alia sub naturali lege, alia sub scripta lege, alia sub gratia. Et in his semper quae tempore posteriora fuerunt, effectu gratiae spiritualis digniora inveniuntur. Omnia enim illa superiora temporis sacramenta, sive sub naturali lege, sive sub scripta; signa quaedam fuerunt et figurae eorum quae nunc sub gratia exhibita sunt sacramentorum».

Victor for the analysis of the idea of natural law and for the understanding of the dedicated verses of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Certainly the masters of the Parisian abbey dealt with other relevant interpretations of the the Pauline text, namely, those of Gilbert of La Porrée, Robert of Melun and Peter Lombard. The twelfth-century Victorines rearranged and revised the understanding of Rm 1:20 and Rm 2:14, taking into account these interpretations; but Hugh's doctrinal heritage remained as their common *fil rouge*. Such a cultural feature is evident from the contents of the *Quaestiones in epistolas Beati Pauli*, a commentary on Paul's Epistle erroneously attributed to Hugh of St. Victor by Migne, but in fact dated to the 1160s²⁰.

Several scholars analysed the literary and doctrinal features of this text, stressing its connections with figures of the second half of the 12th century. Heinrich Denifle already noted that the *Quaestiones* were a mid twelfth-century work, whose roots are in the doctrinal tradition of Hugh of St. Victor even if it cannot be ascribed to him²¹. On the contrary, Denifle and later on Artur Michael Landgraf and Raymond Martin noted that the anonymous author was quite acquainted with the contents and literary form of Robert of Melun's *Quaestiones theologice de epistolis Beati Pauli*²². Going deeper in the analysis of the intellectual landscape of the text, Polemon Glorieux noted that the author of the *Quaestiones* also knows Peter Lombard's *Collectanea* and that his text is not just an heterogeneous combination of different ideas, but a coherent commentary on the Pauline corpus which is quite aware of the major exegetical achievements of its time²³.

Considering more in detail the exegesis of the verses of the Epistle to the Romans concerning nature and natural law, it emerges how the author develops a doctrinal confrontation with the contemporary exegetes. Commenting on Rm 1:20,

the author discusses the meaning of Paul's statement: «For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen», and questions how it is possible to achieve the knowledge of God one and indivisible through the plural and multiple visible things. The author distinguishes between God's nature and the knowledge of that nature that human beings can achieve. Certainly God is one and indivisible (*unum et simplex*), but multiplicity clearly marks the knowledge we have of Him: we know God as qualified by a series of adjectives (good, wise, omnipotent, etc.), so that in human reason what is one by nature shows himself as plural²⁴.

This incommensurability between God's nature and the capabilities of human reason is clearly evident in the theological language²⁵. Speaking about God, human beings can only use a plurality of words and adjectives which correspond at least to three different semantic values: there are words which mean what God is not, such as immortal, immense, infinite and eternal; other words mean what is in God, such as wise and good; finally, other words suggest what God is, such as goodness and wisdom²⁶. With this remark the author expresses his awareness of the specific features of the theological language, which involves a process of "translation", that is a transfer of meaning and value from the ordinary use of the terms to their use speaking about God and his nature.

According to this perspective, Ps. Hugh of St. Victor understands Paul's statement that also the Gentiles have a certain knowledge of God through the visible things, that is through created things, as a description of a possible way to know of God. The anonymous lists four ways to achieve such a knowledge: two from an internal point of view and two from an external one. The inner ways are natural reason and divine inspiration, while the exterior ways are the created things and the Scripture. In doing so, God is able to reveal himself through faith but also through reason. As the

²⁰ See Denifle [1905]: 67; Martin [1938]: xlvi-xlvii; Glorieux [1952]: 59; Landgraf [1973]: 91.

²¹ See Denifle [1905]: 65-67.

²² See Landgraf [1934]: 389; Martin [1938]: xlvi.

²³ See Glorieux [1952]: 52-53.

²⁴ See Ps. Hugh of St. Victor [1879]: 439A-B, P1: 4rb.

²⁵ See Valente [2007].

²⁶ See Ps. Hugh of St. Victor [1879]: 439C, P1: 4rb.

author notes: «In the greatness of the universe the divine power is observed, in beauty the wisdom, and in utility the goodness. So it is evident that a certain image and vestige of the Trinity shines in the universal things as in the single ones»²⁷.

Developing this conclusion on the basis of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, it is clear that God reveals himself to the former through divine inspiration and Scripture, while to the latter by natural reason and creation. Thus, Ps. Hugh of St. Victor argues that the ancient philosophers clearly had a proper knowledge of God, and their denial of honouring Him is inexcusable because they didn't do what they could. This evaluation of the connection between knowledge of God and moral responsibility and the focus on its consequences are common to both Jews and Gentiles, even according to different conditions and ways: the one involves faith and Scripture, the other reason and creation.

This double possibility to know God and the basic universal moral precepts, questions the role of divine grace. The distinction between the Jew's knowledge of God and the Gentile's one seems to create a duality according to which divine grace operates only according to faith, while natural reason is fully capable to achieve the knowledge of divine things with its own strength. Thus, it seems that natural reason can act without the intervention of divine grace. The reference to the knowledge of God that the philosophers have achieved

supports this interpretation of Paul's doctrine: through reason only they derive the existence of God from the creation, and also have a certain understanding of the trinitarian distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the same Apostle suggests the need for the divine grace to achieve also this kind of knowledge of God²⁸.

Ps. Hugh of St. Victor takes into account a distinction between the prelapsarian and the postlapsarian states: before the original sin human reason understood things more easily and perfectly, while after the sin the knowledge is much more difficult and less perfect. To explain the kind of relation which joins together nature and grace the author uses the metaphor of the eye and the light: «The external eye cannot see anything on its own without an external light that enlightens it, that is the rays of sunshine or something similar; in the same way the inner eye cannot see anything on its own without being enlightened by the light which guides every man who comes into this world»²⁹. The example involves the need to distinguish between the role of nature and the role of grace. As Ps. Hugh explains in the following passage developing the metaphor, on the one hand there is the capability to see, which becomes actual only in the presence of the light. On the other hand the author explains that it is correct to say that the capability to see is "by nature", because

²⁷ See Ps. Hugh of St. Victor, in Migne (1879): 439D-440A, *PI*: 4rb-vb: «Quatuor enim modis cognoscitur Deus, duobus modis interior, scilicet per naturalem rationem quam notat Apostolus secundum quosdam dicens: *Quod notum est Dei manifestum est in illis* (Rm 1:19) et per diuinam inspirationem quam ibi notat Apostolus: *Deus enim illis manifestauit* (Rm 1:19). Duobus modis exterior per facturam que modum insinuat Apostolus dicens: *Inuisibilia Dei* etc. (Rm 1:20) et per scripturam, qui modus satis patet. Voluit itaque Deus in quibusdam latere, ut fides haberet meritum et in quibusdam apparere ut infidelitas non haberet excusationem. Nota in magnitudine uniuersitatis notatur diuina potentia, in pulchritudine sapientia, in utilitate bonitas. Vnde constat quod non solum in uniuersis sed in singulis reuocet quedam imago et uestigium trinitatis».

²⁸ Ps. Hugh of St. Victor, in Migne (1879): 441B-C, *PI*: 5rb: «Dicunt quidam quod ratio naturalis multa potest per se, ut apparet in philosophis qui soli rationi innixi multa non solum comprehensione ueritatis circa creaturas, sed etiam circa creatorem cognouerunt, scilicet quod deus est, et unus est, et quod trinus est. Sed et ad hanc cognitionem non uidentur peruenisse sine adiutorio gratie. Vnde Apostolus: *quod notum est dei manifestum est in illis* (Rm 1:19), statimque subiungit: *Deus enim manifestauit illis* (Rm 1:19)».

²⁹ Ps. Hugh of St. Victor [1879]: 441D-442A, *PI*: 5vb. Nonne oculus exterior nihil uidere potest sine illustratione lucis superuenientis sibi, uel radii solis, uel alterius quia oculus interior nihil potest per se sine illustratione lucis, quae illuminat omnem hominem in hunc mundum uenientem.

such a capability is proper of each human being³⁰. Considering the metaphorical meaning of the example, the intervention of divine grace is the only one that makes nature able to do good and accomplish divine law, while “by nature” human beings have the capability to accept the intervention of the divine grace.

The author of the *Quaestiones* clearly deepens Gilbert of La Porrée’s analysis of the value of the idea of nature, assuming an approach which is plainly aware of the specific features of the theological discourse. Once noted that Paul, in these verses of the Epistle to the Romans, uses “nature” to speak about human reason and clarifies the appropriate equilibrium between nature and grace, Ps. Hugh of St. Victor is able to discuss the notion of natural law according to what is said in Rm 2:13-14. More in detail, he focuses on the different meanings of the word “law” (*lex*) and questions what is the law that is able to grant salvation. The two major precepts of loving God and loving neighbour, certainly represent the highest degree of perfection, but the “law” as a precept is not sufficient to justify and grant salvation: what is essential is the accomplishment of the prescriptions and not the prescriptions in themselves. The law shows clearly the right objective, but divine grace is necessary to find the way to achieve it. Accordingly, Ps. Hugh notes that is on the basis of this distinction that Paul can say: «by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified»³¹.

The author discusses an objection to this argument, which questions how the accomplishment of the law could be sufficient to obtain justification, while the Apostle himself denies the value of the works of the law to achieve salvation. The author structures his answer on two points. Firstly he suggests that Paul uses the expression “works of the law” to identify the action made because of the fear of God (*timor Domini*): such an act is a

consequence of the coercion that the law imposes and thus it cannot be considered as an act of justice. Secondly, Ps. Hugh carefully analyses the semantic pluralism of the term *lex* which can be used to identify several things both in the Old and New Testament. For what concerns the Old Testament, “law” would mean: (1) the Pentateuch, (2) the rituals and the accomplishment of the legal prescriptions, (3) the ten precepts written in the two tablets of stone, (4) the book of Psalms, or (5) every kind of observance of rules. Turning to the New Testament, “law” can define: (1) the law of the faith, (2) the law of the spirit, (3) the law of grace, (4) the law of the flesh, (5) the law of the members, (6) the law of sin, and finally (7) the law of death³².

According to this analysis, the verse of Paul’s Epistle entails a vast range of meanings to which the term “natural law” might refer. At the same time it is clear that the master, following Gilbert of La Porrée and the other exegetes and theologians of his time, is fixing a clear boundary, since he is considering key terms, such as “nature” and “law”, only within the theological discourse. Their meaning and value depend on the Scripture, that is on the complex exegesis of the letter of the Old and New Testament, which requires an adequate approach and a specific understanding of its language.

Ps. Hugh of St. Victor’s analysis of the Pauline verses is clearly aware of the increasing complexity of the exegetical discussion concerning the biblical accounts of natural law. The long list of different meanings of the term “law”, combined with the questioning of the idea of nature and its

³⁰ Ps. Hugh of St. Victor, in Migne (1879): 442A, *PI*: 5vb: «Dici potest quod naturaliter uidet quia cum natura data est ei aptitudo et idoneitas uidendi, exposita illa luce de qua summo processit».

³¹ Gal 2:16; see Ps. Hugh of St. Victor [1879]: 450D, *PI*: 10va.

³² Ps. Hugh of St. Victor, in Migne (1879): 451A-B, *PI*: 10vb: «Notandum est quod lex pluribus modis dicitur. Quandoque enim lex uocatur quinque libri Moysi, quandoque ceremonie et legales obseruantie, quandoque decem precepta in duabus tabulis conscripta, quandoque liber psalmodum, quandoque etiam lex dicitur quelibet obseruantia, ut cum dicitur: hec est lex huiusmodi, uel illius rei. Naturalis etiam ratio lex uocatur. In nouo testamento pluribus etiam modis accipitur: ut lex fidei, lex spiritus, lex gratie, lex carnis, lex membrorum, lex peccati, lex mortis».

relation with grace, significantly articulates the discussion with respect to Gilbert's *Glossa*. However, the Victorine theologian shares with this latter the idea that biblical natural law has to be considered within a temporal sequence which follows the history of salvation. Going back to the distinction of three stages in this spiritual order, Ps. Hugh notes that there are three different kinds of people corresponding to three different laws. Natural law is proper of "the people of natural law", who have only the knowledge of the moral and legal precepts by nature, and since Paul's explain that these human beings "are law to themselves", they try to be justified by their own capabilities. Differently, the people of the written law are those to whom the written law has been given; they act according to this written law thinking that the law justifies them. Finally, the people of grace are those to whom grace has been given and who look for justice and salvation in nothing else but grace³³.

This threefold structure of the laws, which assumes a succession according to the "sacred time" of salvation, corresponds to three different kind of people, that is to three different degree in the reconstruction of the integrity of human being after the corruption of the sin. But if, according to Gilbert of La Porrée, the distinction of an age of natural law, an age of the written law and an age of the grace draws the sequence that goes from creation to recreation, Ps. Hugh connects the three levels of law to three different types of people, which correspond to three different types of laws.

³³ Ps. Hugh of St. Victor, in Migne (1879): 455A-B, P1: 12vb-13ra: «Notandum est tria genera esse hominum, scilicet homines legis naturalis, legis scripte, et gratie. Homines legis naturalis dicuntur qui solam legem naturalem habent, nec aliquid superadditur. Homines legis scripte sunt illi, quibus lex scripta est data, nec habent aliquid superadditum. Homines gratie sunt quibus data est ipsa gratia. Vel aliter: homines legis naturalis dicuntur qui ex suis uiribus querunt iustificari; homines legis scripte dicuntur qui legi innituntur, extimando quod lex iustificet; homines gratie dicuntur qui non aliunde, nisi ex sola gratia querunt iusticiam et salutem».

CONCLUSIONS

Gilbert of La Porrée's *Glossa* and Ps. Hugh of St. Victor's *Quaestiones* are precious witnesses of the theological debate on natural law in the central decades of the 12th century. From both texts it is clear that, taking its lead from the exegesis of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the *lex naturalis* is becoming part of the theological discourse and language. More in detail, the two Pauline commentaries show the analysis of some specific terms, namely "nature" and "law". The former is not referred to the order of the medieval world, but to human reason as the feature proper of human being, that is the element according to which humankind is created in the image of God. At the same time, "law" assumes a plurality of meanings both in the Old and New Testaments, designating different kinds of prescriptions and obligations, but also authoritative texts and statements.

Beside these common background, the *Glossa* and the *Quaestiones* show the doctrinal pluralism on this issue. According to Gilbert of La Porrée, natural law is the capability of all human beings to know God and the moral principle of divine laws: it is a capability written in the heart of people at the moment of creation. Ps. Hugh of St. Victor considers the lemma "natural law" as the designation of the moral status of the people who are law to themselves, that is the Gentiles, while the written law is the condition of the Jews, who conform their moral life only to the law of Moses. The law of grace represents a third status which is superior to the others, since people conform themselves to the activity of divine grace and thus search justice and salvation through grace alone.

The two texts reveal a complex search for a theological and exegetical foundation of moral life which is deeply connected with the relevance that the Scripture has in the religious experience of the people, particularly in the urban context of the second half of the 12th century. In fact, the cities, with their cathedral schools and masters, are the scene of a wide and diversified "evangelical

awakening”³⁴. As the case of natural law shows, the Scripture does not just offer a lexicon to this religious, political and cultural landscape; it is the subject of analysis, interpretations and discussions which express the complex intellectual dynamic of a whole historical context.

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³⁴ See Chenu [1957]: 252-273.

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