

That new, truly democratic Anarchism was made possible, Graeber thinks, not so much by the Occupy movement's claim to represent the impoverished "99 percent" against the unholy nexus of big government and big corporations in the wake of the financial collapses of 2008. True democracy emerged, he insists, precisely from the refusal to say what exactly the Occupy movement wanted. Occupy was refusal—refusal of the whole mess and an effort not to participate in it even by standard forms of organized protest. "It was only when a movement appeared that resolutely refused to take the traditional path that rejected the existing political order as inherently corrupt, that called for the complete reinvention of American democracy, that occupations immediately began to blossom across the country." Indeed, "the movement did not succeed despite the anarchist element. It succeeded because of it."

The problem with all this is, of course, that Occupy Wall Street and its clones in other cities did not actually succeed. They sprouted up, they died (or were at last murdered by the police, in some occupiers' accounts), and nothing changed. The dilemma of Anarchism has always been a practical one: Every attempt at actual Anarchism has eventually become either a puppet of the communists, a leftist statism, or *actual* anarchy—which is to say a mob without staying power or resilience.

Still, Graeber retains his enormous optimism. "We are already anarchists," he claims, "every time we come to understandings with one another that would not require physical threats as a means of enforcement." The bombings and shootings of the original anarchists—in what they called "the propaganda of the deed"—have proved unnecessary, for the *fact* of the Occupy movement forever changed its participants. They proved, Graeber insists, that the paradox of anarchical organization is possible to overcome, and their example will last in a way that the anarchistic forebears he claims in the revolutions of 1848 and 1968 did not.

Less optimistic is James C. Scott, a Yale anthropologist best known for his work in Southeast Asian history—and someone who, the much younger David Graeber declares, stands as "one of the great political thinkers of our time." Unfortunately, in *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, Scott refuses to give us a straightforward book of political thought. What he writes is a meandering set of what he calls "fragments" instead of continuous text. And the idea, I think, is that somehow the anti-organization of the text would echo and reinforce for us the anti-organization of anarchical society.

Scott usually calls himself a Marxist, but the recent

protests of the anarchists, born in the financial crisis, have created in him a new appreciation for Anarchism—or, at least, enough for him to give the movement the same two out of three cheers Irving Kristol gave in *Two Cheers for Capitalism* and E. M. Forster in *Two Cheers for Democracy*. It would be nice if the refusal to give the third cheer were from a recognition of at least a temporary need for some genuine hierarchical government (before, as the Marxists say, the state withers away), and Scott does accept that need, to some degree. The real reason he can't fully support the political philosophy, however, is that Anarchism is insufficiently prepared for revolution. It is *disorganized*, as one might expect from people who want anarchy. And for the overthrowing of the state, the eradication of the current institutionalized oppressions, that makes it inadequate.

And yet, for everything short of that final goal—for preparing the way and having fun while doing it—he praises the kind of non-hierarchical Anarchism that Occupy Wall Street possessed. Scott hates the state: the economic inequalities it licenses, the efforts it makes to force all to think alike, the bureaucratic methods it uses for undemocratic, unelected control. And he thinks we ought all to resist it, even short of organized revolution.

"The enthusiasm, spontaneity, and creativity" of a "cascading social movement," he notes, can run "far ahead of the organizations wishing to represent, coordinate, and channel it." And, in an interesting and probably accurate reinterpretation of received history, he dismisses the mainstream organizations that emerged out of the civil-rights struggle in the 1960s as merely the groups with the best public-relations teams—the ones that successfully sold themselves as leaders to a media desperate for an intelligible, hierarchical account with which to understand what was going on. The real civil rights movement, Scott argues, was much wilder, much woollier, and much wackier. Much more like what anarchists want.

This is his solution to the leftist historical puzzle that, as he notes, "every major successful revolution ended by creating a state more powerful than the one it overthrew." Indeed, even the Occupy movement's revolutionary rejection of hierarchical revolution brings risks: "Massive disruption and defiance can, under some conditions, lead directly to authoritarianism or fascism rather than reform."

But that's because we aren't yet ready for real democratic reform. We need to get our minds straight, he thinks; we need to experience the petty anarchies of this new small Anarchism of refusal. We need to attempt a little more—no, a *lot* more—"foot-dragging, poaching, pilfering, dissimulation, sabotage, desertion, absenteeism, squatting, and flight" in our everyday lives under this oppressive regime. In Scott's view, what recent movements such as Occupy

Wall Street have taught us is that, before the revolution, even Anarchism requires some genuine anarchy.

So what are we to think of all this? In the end, the Occupy movement was a disease desperate for a diagnosis, and Anarchism was a diagnosis hungry for a disease. Determined by many factors—*over-determined*, in fact—their joining was probably inevitable. That doesn't mean, however, that they actually do go together, fitting like hand and glove. They fit more like a pair of boulders that have smashed into each other, and the resulting fissures show even in Graeber and Scott's work. Neither author can fully decide what he thinks about at least a minimal purpose for the hierarchical state, neither author is fully honest about the violence that always threatens to break out in human affairs but especially in anarchical situations, and neither is willing to face up to how self-important and even a little pathetic it is, finally, to promote to grand themes of universal political theory the recent protest movements that, after all, achieved nothing.

Perhaps it's worth noticing that the most interesting proposals for Christian Anarchism, from Simone Weil to Wendell Berry, are usually rural, usually agrarian—while the canonical writings of Anarchism, from Pierre-Joseph Proudhon to Emma Goldman, are essentially urban. The Occupy movement occurred entirely in cities, of course, and so it seems natural that its theorists have turned to those urban texts.

And yet the protestors who gathered in the actual Occupy encampments, like the young couple I met in New York, often stepped away from the classic forms of Anarchism by excising clear moral purposes from their protests. They typically took it as a point of pride, as a moral principle, that they would not specify exactly what they wanted—for "Demands imply condition, and we will never stop. Demands cannot reflect the time scale that we are working with." In doing so, they found themselves recapitulating not the history of anarchistic revolution but an old religious history of apocalyptic movements, aghast at the failure of God to bring an end to the mess, the evil, they thought they could perceive so clearly.

They didn't know this is what they were doing, of course, and given their extreme anti-Christianity, they would resist the explanation with all their strength. But if they genuinely want to build up an explanatory political theory for their experience in their short-lived camps, they might read a little in the Christian anarchists. Or in St. Augustine, for that matter—a man who knew a little about the cost of anarchy, as the Vandals closed around the city of Hippo and the great Roman political order began to collapse. **B&C**

The Real Presence of Hope & Love

The Christocentric legacy of Benedict XVI.

HANS BOERSMA

In 1966, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, in partnership with Christianity Today magazine, sponsored the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin. Further conferences followed over the next four years. Finally, in July 1974, a ten-day gathering was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, for discussion, fellowship, worship, and prayer. The influence of many noteworthy global leaders marked this event, but the most important development was likely the adoption of the Lausanne Covenant, whose chief architect was the late John R. Stott.

The Lausanne committee has remained a grass-roots conversation, right through the third global gathering, held

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in Cape Town (October 2010). The Cape Town Commitment urged all Christians to work together in unity for mission. This led to conversations with Catholic leaders, including the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In a visit to Rome in 2011, I heard Vatican leaders specifically ask for more conversation between Catholics and evangelicals. The first Lausanne Catholic-Evangelical Conversation was held at Mundelein Seminary (Illinois) on April 18–20, 2013. We began with two presentations on the centrality of Christ, by Hans Boersma and Edward T. Oakes. An edited version of Hans Boersma's paper appears below; the paper by Father Oakes will appear in the November/December issue of BOOKS & CULTURE.

—John H. Armstrong, chair of the Lausanne Catholic-Evangelical Conversation and president of the ACT3 Network in Carol Stream, Illinois.

The lasting legacy of Pope Benedict XVI may well prove to be, as Edward Oakes has recently argued, his insistence on a Christocentric theological approach.¹ The Christocentrism of Benedict's thought is worth highlighting for at least two reasons. First, we have developed a nasty tendency in contemporary Western society to classify theological approaches under the remarkably non-theological rubrics of "conservative" and "progressive." In this taxonomy, Benedict mostly gets qualified as a "conservative." He is, after all, as the media remind us *ad nauseam*, opposed to abortion, euthanasia, contraception, and same-sex marriage. To the degree that theological language does enter the media, Ratzinger becomes the moralist, the one who as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith shut up "progressive" theologians, such as Thomas Reese, Leonardo Boff and others, who opposes genuine inter-faith dialogue, who writes off Protestant believers as sub-par, and whose liturgical leanings would have us return to the horrors of the ritualism and authoritarianism of the pre-Vatican II period. Needless to say, in the media frenzy that developed after Pope Benedict's resignation, most

1. Edward T. Oakes, "Christ Our Center"; presentation delivered at the Lausanne Catholic-Evangelical Conversation at Mundelein Seminary, April 18, 2013.

of the media pundits dutifully followed this well-trodden path, as they repeatedly wondered out loud whether or not the next pope would be just as “conservative” as Benedict had been, or whether perhaps we could finally hope to move on to someone more “progressive.”

There are, however, exceptions to this non-theological approach. On Wednesday, March 6, exactly one week before the election of Pope Francis, the Canadian *National Post* carried a column written by George Jonas, a Jewish immigrant from Hungary, who isn't in any way particularly religious. Jonas recognizes the cultural mood for what it is. He entitled his column

“Ask not how God is relevant to you, but how you are relevant to God.” Reflecting on the cultural pressures that might be brought to bear on the cardinals in the conclave, Jonas worried out loud about the desire to be seen as “up-to-date” or “relevant”—to find a pope, in other words, who would accept the non-theological bifurcation of “conservative” versus “progressive” in order to do obeisance to the cultural demand for an up-to-date Catholicism. Jonas concludes with the following comment: “As I mentioned before, I'm not religious. If I were, however, I think I'd have something more important to worry about than God's relevance to me. I'd

worry about my relevance to God. And in the unlikely event that the cardinals asked me, I'd say that worrying about what's relevant instead of what's right is the quickest way to irrelevance.”² There's nothing quite like being reminded by an outsider of what genuinely counts in matters related to the faith. With regard to Benedict, what stands out is not his alleged “conservatism” but his focus on Christ in matters both theological and moral. That is what will render him relevant for many years to come.

The second reason why the

2. georgejonas.ca/journalism/2013/03/06/ask-not-how-god-is-relevant-to-you-but-how-you-are-relevant-to-god.

Christocentrism of Ratzinger is notable has to do with how we look at dialogue between Catholics and Protestants. Protestants have long been afraid that Catholics take their starting-point in human realities. Human merit before God, Mary and the saints as objects of our adoration, the concrete materiality of Baptism and Eucharist—these, and other aspects of Catholic theology and spirituality, seem to Protestants attempts to place ourselves in the position of the risen Lord, as a move from Christocentrism to anthropocentrism. Oakes' insistence, therefore, that Ratzinger's theology is marked first and foremost by its Christocentrism, should make Protestants sit up and listen. And I think there is a sense in which it should make both Protestants *and* Catholics sit up and listen. If, after all, Oakes is right that Christocentrism lies at the heart of Ratzinger's thought, then this is the key also to how we can deconstruct the relativism of our culture that thinks only in terms of the binaries of “conservative” and “progressive.” To place Christ at the center is to gainsay the need to be “up-to-date” or “relevant.” To place Christ at the center is, therefore, also to stab at the heart of the relativism that underlies this division between “conservative” and “progressive.” There is good reason, I think, why Ratzinger's most stringent rejection of relativism comes under the title of *Dominus Iesus* (2000). It is the Lord Jesus who sent us on a mission in the world, and it is his Lordship and the definitive character of his revelation that are “the true lode-star' in history for all humanity,” as the document's concluding paragraph puts it. Evangelicals and Catholics should be drawn together by this theological—that is to say, Christological—focus, which is the real antidote to so much non-theological humbug that typifies most media interest in Catholic thought and in the Christian faith in general. The insistence that Christ is the beginning, the center, and the end of theology has always served as reminder that in terms of theology and morality there is something more important to worry about than God's relevance to us, namely, our relevance to God.

I want to reflect on this Christocentrism of Pope Benedict's thought, and I will do so by focusing on his first two encyclicals, which are my favorites—*Deus caritas est* (his 2005 encyclical on love) and *Spe salvi* (his 2007 encyclical on hope). In some ways, the first is the most significant. Here we have the newly appointed pope—known the world over as “God's Rottweiler” because of his dogged protection of Catholic orthodoxy as leader of the “Inquisition” (the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith)—presenting the world with a profound meditation on the centrality of love. What is more, the new pope made clear in the first paragraph that love is not God, but that God is love (1 John 4:16)—offering his love to us in Jesus Christ: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person. . . . Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should . . . have eternal life’ (3:16).” I will skip over Benedict's remarkable and profound reflections on *eros* and *agape* (“ascending”

and “descending” love), which he regards as different dimensions of a single reality. I want to highlight instead Benedict’s insistence that the love of God has become incarnate: “The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism.” For Benedict, it is only by starting out with Christ that we can understand what love is like: “By contemplating the pierced side of Christ . . . we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: ‘God is love’ (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin.” For Benedict, then, “Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or a moralism. Christianity is instead an encounter, a love story; it is an event.”³

If it’s true that a proper understanding of love begins with Christ, then we will take this-worldly realities seriously. After all, Incarnation means that God has taken on human flesh. And so Benedict asks us to take the visibility of God seriously: “God has made himself visible: in Jesus we are able to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:9).” This visibility results from the fact that God gives himself to us in Jesus. The visibility of God’s presence in Christ is something Catholics and evangelicals need to reflect on in dialogue, because it touches on Catholic sensibilities that evangelicals should perhaps appreciate more than they usually do. For Pope Benedict, the visibility of God in Christ immediately implies what he calls a “sacramental ‘mysticism.’” The visibility of God is meaningful for us precisely because we are drawn into Christ in the Eucharistic celebration. Benedict puts it this way:

[The] *Logos* now truly becomes food for us—as love. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God’s presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus’ self-gift, sharing in his body and blood.

I earlier mentioned the Protestant fear that Catholic thought places this-worldly, human realities too much in the center. And Protestants may well be right to question how Catholics sometimes interpret Christ’s “real presence” in the Eucharist. But Pope Benedict’s theology provides an excellent starting-point for a discussion on this: the beauty of his reflections lies in the twofold focus on love and Christology. In Christ’s self-giving in the Lord’s Supper, God makes visible his eternal love for us.

We see a similar sacramental mysticism at work in Pope Benedict’s second encyclical, *Spe salvi*. Here, too, the grounding is Christocentric. Prior to our encounter with Christ, Benedict reminds us with a

reference to Ephesians 2:12, we were “without hope and without God in the world.” Christ is the “personal God” who “governs the stars, that is, the universe,” so that “it is not the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love—a Person.” The Bishop of Rome reiterates the message from his earlier encyclical on love when he comments: “Life is not a simple product of laws and the randomness of matter, but within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal will, there is a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love.”

Also here, it is for Benedict this personal love of God in the Word that has taken

on human flesh that should encourage us and that gives us the true substance of our hope. Hope, in other words, isn’t a pie-in-the-sky sort of dream we make up; instead, it is grounded in the reality of people who “have been touched by Christ.” The word “touched” is surely significant here. According to *Deus caritas est*, God allows us to *see* him; *Spe salvi* makes clear that he also allows us to *touch* him. As we reflect on the lives of people who have been touched by Christ, these lives become meaningful also for us: “[T]heir way of acting and living is *de facto* a ‘proof that the things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await,

but a real presence.” The lives of those who have touched Christ become a “real presence,” argues Benedict. The sacramental language—“real presence”—is hardly accidental. The reason our hope is not an irrational mirage lies in the fact that, in Christ, God has entered history and that people can actually touch him. Hope, therefore, “is the expectation of things to come from the perspective of a present that is already given. It is a looking-forward in Christ’s presence, with Christ who is present, to the perfecting of his Body, to his definitive coming.” Again, the sacramental language of “presence” is striking.

3. Joseph Ratzinger, “Homily for Msgr Luigi Giusanni,” *Communio: International Catholic Review*, Vol. 31 (2004), pp. 685–87, at 685; as quoted in Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), p. 67.

The two encyclicals are obviously similar. Both are Christocentric and both are sacramental. But the way in which sacramentality gets expressed differs from the one encyclical to the other. *Deus caritas est* zeroes in on Christ's presence in the Eucharist; union with God becomes ours in and through the Eucharist. *Spe salvi* hardly mentions the Eucharist. It does something rather different. It tells stories—stories of saints, the one after the other. After mentioning our acceptance of suffering through union with Christ, who himself suffered with infinite love, Benedict shares with us a letter from the 19th-century Vietnamese martyr Le-Bao-Tinh, which reads:

The prison here is a true image of everlasting Hell; to cruel tortures of every kind—shackles, iron chains, manacles—are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, for his mercy is for ever. In the midst of these torments, which usually terrify others, I am, by the grace of God, full of joy and gladness, because I am not alone—Christ is with me. . . . In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor towards the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my heart.

Le-Bao-Tinh's "letter from Hell" becomes a hope-filled "hymn of praise" thanks to his union with Christ.

Both encyclicals know of sacramental presence. But the first encyclical sees the real presence of love in the Eucharist, while the second locates it in the real presence of hope in the narratives of the real lives of flesh-and-blood people such as Le-Bao-Tinh. He is but one instance

of this real presence of hope. *Spe salvi* is filled with stories and examples of this real presence. There is Josephine Bakhita, a slave from Sudan who gets to know the heavenly master in slavery, in Italy. There is St. Francis of Assisi, who from the "substance" of his hope spreads hope to others. There is St. Augustine, who gets ordained in spite of himself and as a result sets out to "transmit hope." There is Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, who is imprisoned for thirteen years and writes his *Prayers of Hope*. And, of course, there is Mary, who becomes for us "the image of the Church to come, which carries the hope of the world across the mountains of history." Benedict is convinced that we need these examples, these narratives of hope's real presence:

I need the certitude of that true, great hope, of which we have spoken here. For this too we need witnesses—martyrs—who have given themselves totally, so as to show us the way—day after day. We need them if we are to prefer goodness to comfort, even in the little choices we face each day—knowing that this is how we live life to the full.

The real presence of hope is Christocentric; it is given with God's presence in Christ. This same real presence also comes to us in the lives of the saints who have gone before us. Heirs of John Calvin cannot but be struck by the similarities between Benedict's focus on God's real presence in the saints and Calvin's theology of union with Christ.⁴

I don't think there's a contradiction between the two encyclicals. For one, *Deus caritas est* isn't without the

4. Cf. J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2008).

presence of the saints. The last two sections hold out for us several models of charity. And the emeritus Bishop of Rome would probably argue that the two kinds of real presence—that of love in the Eucharist and that of hope in believers' lives—are complementary, and that the second flows from the first.

The legacy of Pope Benedict is the witness of a thorough-going Christological focus. This Christocentrism should warm the heart of evangelical believers, for it is the centrality of Christ that enables us to overcome the narrow-mindedness of a culture whose only remaining norms are those of the flattened horizons of this world. Evangelicals do well to listen attentively to their Catholic friends as they speak to us of "real presence." The relativism of a flat culture—a culture that knows only of "conservatives" and of "progressives"—can be overcome only in one way, by turning to the real presence of love and of hope that are anchored in Christ; all this is about union with Christ. More than ever before, evangelicals and Catholics belong together. Love and hope cannot but make them look out for each other. In no way do I mean to suggest that the "how" of Christ's "real presence" is a matter of indifference or that we should ignore the significant doctrinal issues at stake in our continued divisions. But this ecumenical task is one that we may undertake in the knowledge that faith, hope, and love bind us together. After all, as Pope Benedict puts it: "Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and to persevere."⁵

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5. *Spe salvi*, no. 35.

Mother Mary

BRUCE FOLTZ

How to approach this first English translation of the oldest complete biography of the Virgin Mary, dating from the 7th century, and most likely narrated by one of the finest theological minds of Late Antiquity? Two preliminaries, along with a few corresponding questions, may help with this somewhat unusual challenge.

First, a thought experiment. Imagine the discovery of an ancient treasury of stories about the Virgin Mary, and with it wonderful new details concerning the life of Christ, rescued from the ancient Greek original through its translation into Old Georgian, a language of the Caucasus Mountains, by a monk on Mt. Athos. Would this not be a most exciting event, epochal in its implications? Ah, we might ask, but do we know that these stories are historically accurate? Might not the very emphasis upon the Virgin Mary, rather than Christ himself, even suggest their later and derivative character? Would we, then, take these as stories about the Virgin Mary, or rather as reflections of the time and place of their composition?

In fact, Stephen J. Shoemaker has offered us just such a collection of wonderful stories, stories that were taken so seriously by the ancient Church that it based many of its most important feast days upon them. (This legacy continues, with six of these feast days still shared in common by the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, five of which are also recognized by the Anglican Communion, despite the fact that only one of these narratives, the Annunciation, is mentioned in canonical Scripture.) The translator, a professor of religious studies to whom we must be grateful, is clear about his own answer to the question: "Of course there is no reason to assume that these

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supplements to Mary's biography bear any relation to the historical realities of earliest Christianity." Nevertheless, he adds, these narratives are "invaluable for the insight they offer into how Christians at the end of antiquity had come to remember the mother of their Lord and how they interpreted her significance." In this case, the biography should be read as not actually being about the Mother of God at all, but about the mindset of 7th-century Christians in the Byzantine East.

Second, a story. A certain medieval Russian icon of the Mother of God, the Kursk Root Icon, is so greatly loved and venerated for its wonder-working character that an Orthodox priest is assigned to travel with it throughout the United States and indeed the world. This priest relates how once, while travelling with the icon through the South, he felt a strong inclination to pull over at a rest stop, even though he was quite near his destination. Once he pulled over, a man immediately approached, expressing an urgent need to speak with him. Uncertain how to explain the nature of his mission easily, and needing to proceed to the parish where he was being awaited, he found himself inspired to say something to which he felt the man might relate, this being religious country. "Do you believe in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?" asked the priest. "I do, sir," came the reply, "I do." "Well," the priest replied, "we have his mother in the back seat!"

Once the surprise had subsided, he continued, "Why don't you come along and see." Finding this irresistible, the man followed him to the church, heard his talk on the Virgin Mary, and reverently stood in silence before the icon, coming up afterward with a transformed countenance. Recounting the recent death of a loved one, the loss of his job, and severe health concerns, he said tearfully, "Father, when I saw you I was about to do harm to myself. Now I know I will be all right." Is this a story about the Virgin Mary, narrating how God continues to work wonders through her? Or is it just a touching story about two strangers who met by happy coincidence?

To fully understand the stories compiled in this biography, we need to approach them as would have the contemporaries of Maximus the Confessor, their compiler. To the ancient church of the first millennium,

through the Incarnation of Christ and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, God was actively at work in the world, ever operative in our midst. This divine activity could be experienced in different modes: through the Holy Scriptures, of course, and in the Eucharist and the other mysteries of the Church—but also through holy relics, which continue to work miracles. They were present in holy places where the Lord had lived, and in sacred spots where martyrs had witnessed to their faith. They were at work during major feasts of the Church, roughly half of which concern the Virgin Mary. The divine energies were active in holy icons, and indeed through holy stories, such as those related in this book. Thus, the first and second preliminary examples mentioned above would have been given much the same status, with the recent story about the Kursk Root Icon understood as revealing a kind of epiphany of the Mother of God, just as do the icon itself and the Marian narratives. That is to say, there was always something like a shared experience of spiritual realities, a collective sense of how and where God could best be encountered even within this world, albeit through his energies or activities (*energeiai*) rather than through his ever-transcendent essence (*ousia*).

But does this mean we must accept these stories as possessing only spiritual importance, rather than also narrating historical truth? The ancient Church did not make this distinction, nor would it have found it meaningful. Moreover, ethnologists and philologists increasingly acknowledge the impressive ability of traditional peoples to pass down narratives intact through generations and across time. (We may recall that both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were preserved for centuries before being written down, and that schoolchildren in *madrassas* still memorize the entire Koran, even without knowledge of Arabic.) Finally, those with Protestant backgrounds will surely want to ask whether the Early Church could have esteemed the Virgin Mary to such a degree. The

The Life of the Virgin

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