

To the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:  
Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Washington DC  
Bishop Leonard Blair, Toledo OH  
Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, Indianapolis IN  
Archbishop José Gomez, Los Angeles CA  
Bishop William Lori, Bridgeport CT  
Bishop Robert McManus, Worcester MA  
Bishop Kevin Rhoades, Fort Wayne - South Bend IN  
Bishop Arthur Serratelli, Paterson NJ  
Archbishop Allen Vigneron, Detroit MI

In the cover letter to the U.S. Bishops on March 30, 2011 that accompanied the Committee on Doctrine's criticism of my book *Quest for the Living God*, Cardinal Donald Wuerl stated that the Committee was always open to dialogue with theologians and would welcome an opportunity to discuss my writings with me. In my one public statement on the matter, released April 1, 2011, I also expressed a willingness to dialogue over these matters.

In a letter dated April 28, 2011, I was informed that Cardinal Donald Wuerl reiterated this openness to dialogue, and expressed the willingness of the Committee on Doctrine to receive any written observations that I would wish to make with regard to its Statement about my book. The observations which follow are in response to this invitation.

I write these observations in the spirit of the Egyptian bishop Athanasius. I've always appreciated his words, written during the conflict that ensued after the Council of Nicea when three groups contended vociferously over the right way to express Jesus Christ's divine identity. Athanasius, who upheld the *homoousios* (one in being) teaching of the Council, noted that his party and the *homoiousios* party (similar in being), originally perceived as opponents, were actually on the same side as compared with the subordinationist Arian position. In the effort to forge unity, he wrote:  
those, however, who accept everything else that was defined at Nicea, and doubt only about the *homoousios*, must not be treated as enemies; nor do we here attack them as Ario-maniacs, nor as opponents of the Fathers; but we discuss the matter with them as brothers with brothers, who mean what we mean, and dispute only about the words. (*De Synodis* 41)

The Committee on Doctrine's Statement declared that my book contains misrepresentations, ambiguities, and errors with regard to Catholic teaching. My statement spoke of misrepresentations, misinterpretations, and an incorrect picture of my book in the committee's Statement. I also expressed regret that a prior conversation had not taken place to perhaps allay these difficulties. In view of our common concern for the church and for the richness of its teaching, I hope in these observations to discuss the matter with you as sister with brothers, "who mean what we mean, and dispute only about the words."

Thank you for this invitation to dialogue.

Peace,

Dr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J.  
Distinguished Professor of Theology  
Fordham University  
June 1, 2011

Cc. Fr. Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap., Executive Director

To Speak Rightly of the Living God:  
Observations by Dr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ  
on the  
Statement of the Committee on Doctrine  
of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
about her book  
*Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*

Introduction

The first observation I would like to make underscores the obvious: *Quest for the Living God* is a work of theology. It is not a catechism, nor a compendium of doctrine, nor does it intend to set out the full range of church teaching on the doctrine of God. Rather, it presents areas of Christian life and study where the mystery of the living God is being glimpsed anew in contemporary situations. Hence the subtitle, *Mapping Frontiers*.

To be specific: Listening to theologies emerging within distinct contexts in the church, *Quest* presents ideas and images of God surfacing, being tested, spiritually prayed, and ethically lived out in eight different conversations: in transcendental, political, liberation, feminist/womanist, black, Latino/Latina, interreligious, and ecological theologies. Each of these conversations wrestles with the word of God amid, respectively, the onslaught of atheism; massive public suffering; the oppression of poverty, sexism, racism, and ethnic prejudice; respectful encounter with other religions; and the amazing discoveries of science. The book culminates, quite deliberately, in a chapter on the Christian belief in God as Trinity, to which I suggest all these different discourses have been contributing rich angles of understanding. *Quest* is offered to readers as an invitation to think about their own idea of the living God in view of this new scholarship.

As a whole, it seems to me, the book illustrates the dynamic process described by the Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*:

For there is growth in understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and the study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (Lk 2:19, 51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. (§8)

Precisely this type of activity is illuminated in each chapter of *Quest*; for example, the idea of the

liberating God emerging through the experience of struggle, prayer, and study done by the church of the poor in Latin America.

It appears that part of the present difficulty stems from the Statement's reading my book as if it belonged to a genre other than theology. Theological research does not simply reiterate received doctrinal formulas but probes and interprets them in order to deepen understanding. To do this well, theology throughout history has articulated faith in different thought forms, images, and linguistic expressions. Its work employs all manner of methods and ideas taken from other disciplines in order to shed light on the meaning of faith.

In a reflection encouraging a vital interchange between theology and science, Pope John Paul II expressed a hope for this work:

“Just as Aristotelian philosophy, through the ministry of such great scholars as Thomas Aquinas, ultimately came to shape some of the most profound expressions of theological doctrine, so can we not hope that the sciences of today, along with all forms of human knowing, may invigorate and inform those parts of the theological enterprise that bear on the relation of nature, humanity, and God?” (*Message to the Vatican Observatory*, 1988).

It is critically important, he continued, that each discipline should enrich, nourish, and challenge the other for the future good of humanity. Theology, of course, should not take on all ideas from science or other disciplines indiscriminately. “As these findings become part of the intellectual culture of the time, however, theologians must understand them and test their value in bringing out from Christian belief some of the possibilities which have not yet been realized.” After adducing examples from the Middle Ages, the pope seems to chide today's theologians for being too timorous: “Theologians might well ask, with respect to contemporary science, philosophy, and other areas of human knowing, if they have accomplished this extraordinarily difficult process as well as did these medieval masters.” The options, he urged, do not include isolation, fear, or “every regressive tendency to a unilateral reductionism.” Rather, “The vitality and significance of theology for humanity will in a profound way be reflected in its ability to incorporate these findings.”

I bring forward this message not simply because I participated to my benefit as a younger theologian from the resulting dialogue with scientists sponsored by the Vatican Observatory, and not

only because the fruits of that exchange form a chapter of *Quest*, but because of the message's vision of what theology is supposed to be doing: engage with the world; dialogue critically with all forms of human knowing; bring that wisdom to bear on faith; invigorate understanding of the relation of humanity and God; bring out new possibilities in Christian expression of the revelation God has given; for the common good of all.

*Quest for the Living God* presents theologies from around the world which are doing precisely this. The Statement faults the book for not being in accord with church teaching because it does not repeat established doctrinal formulas. Simply because things are said in a different way, however, does not mean that traditional formulas of faith, let alone the core understanding of faith they convey, are being rejected. It is of course not the case that everything that theology says is correct, and here the episcopal teaching office has its proper role. But let me underscore the fact that this book does not deny, either explicitly or implicitly, any central doctrine of the church derived from scripture and creed. Rather, it represents how contemporary believers are seeking to express the ancient wisdom with new relevance. In this, it accords with the view of Pope John XXIII whose memorable opening speech to the Second Vatican Council called for formulation of doctrine in the literary forms of modern thought, since "the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another."

My initial observation, which governs all the rest, is that *Quest for the Living God* is a work of theology. It presents the dialogue of faith with ideas beyond the ecclesiastical circle, exploring new possibilities in Christian belief and practice coherent with people's lives today, as did the ancient and medieval theologians for their day. It is a work of theology and it would be good to read it on those terms.

The following observations are divided into two parts of five sections each, roughly paralleling the committee's Statement. The first part deals with fundamental issues; the second, with insights into the mystery of God arising from particular theologies.

### 1. The Faith of the Church

The committee's Statement rightly asserts (2) that those who embark on the study of the mystery of God should do so from within the very heart of the Church's faith. It judges, however (20), that the

basic problem with *Quest* is that the book does not take the faith of the church as its starting point. This is the first point on which we might dialogue, because I find this judgment baffling. Not only does *Quest for the Living God* begin with the faith of the church, but it also ends there as well.

On the first page I note that around the world “different groups of Christian people, stressed by particular historical circumstances, have been gaining glimpses of the living God in fresh and unexpected ways.” This does not mean they are discovering a novel God, the text continues, but are gaining a deeper appreciation of what previous generations believed, in line with Augustine’s acclamation, “O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you.” The second page of *Quest* reiterates this starting point, explaining further how on different continents Christians struggling with atheism, injustice, and other weighty issues have sensed and been grasped by God’s presence. Theologians in these communities articulate the insights arising from the faith-filled insights and practices of these people, which in turn open up challenging paths of discipleship for the whole church. The “Introduction” ends with the invitation to readers to think about their own idea of God, and perhaps discover something more in what has already been found to be life-giving and true by others in the church. “The result can be a greater richness of faith that cleaves to the living God and shows itself in passionate care for the world” (5).

In the “Epilogue” *Quest* states that the ideas presented have arisen as a result of faith’s encounter with the living God amid changing, life-or-death circumstances. It notes that in every instance the theology presented is substantiated by scripture, tradition, and/or church teaching and buttressed by cogent lines of reasoning. The destructive power of sin, it continues, risks ruining God’s good creation. “In face of this risk, the active presence of the living God in the world, *regardless*, is one of the oldest and most enduring of biblical promises. By listening with people to where the Spirit is moving in their lives today, by attending to what this signifies, by interpreting it creatively in terms of the treasure of biblical faith, and by calling for the praxis of universal solidarity in suffering and hope, these theologies shed light on ways in which that ancient promise does not disappoint” (227).

Explicitly, then, this book starts and finishes with the faith of the church, defining itself in that light. In trying to figure out why the committee’s Statement concludes the opposite, I recalled Avery Dulles’ classic work *Models of the Church*. Here he describes different ways of thinking about the church: as institution, as people of God, as sacrament, as herald, as servant, and later, as community of

disciples. Each model has its advantages and disadvantages; while different, they are complementary; all are needed for full understanding. Is it possible that the Statement is working out of one model of the church and *Quest* from another?

The church in whose faith this book finds its home is delineated in the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*. Following its first chapter on Christ as the Light of the Nations, and prior to delineating the roles of hierarchy and laity and the witness of religious orders which may belong to either group, this constitution, after heated conciliar debate, positions the church as all the people of God. This is the whole community of believers who, blessed with the baptismal gifts of the Spirit and sharing in the mission of Jesus Christ, cling to the faith handed on by the saints, penetrate it more deeply by accurate insights, and apply it more thoroughly to life. Carrying forward this teaching, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states simply: "The faith of the faithful is the faith of the Church, received from the apostles" (§ 949). Such is the understanding of the faith of the church that frames my book. It is the faith of the people of God.

I remember being profoundly instructed upon first reading the essay by John Henry Newman (subsequently Cardinal, now Blessed), *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*. One of his key examples is the situation of the post-Nicene controversy, when the laity clung to the council's teaching on the divinity of Christ while many of the bishops went back to teaching Arianism. Newman notes that this is "as striking an instance as I could take ... that the voice of tradition may in certain cases express itself, not by Councils, nor Fathers, nor Bishops, but the *communis fidelium sensus*." This sense of the faithful, he explains, a sort of practical wisdom (*phronema*) deep in the heart of the mystical body of Christ, can be taken as a direction of the Holy Spirit which gives "testimony to the fact of the apostolical dogma" not only in the fourth century but as a basic characteristic of the church. Please note that I am not saying the church is currently in a similar situation of crisis over doctrine. My point is that Newman's understanding underscores the legitimacy, with all due critical discernment, of consulting the faithful in matters of the doctrine of God. Such consultation requires taking the insight and practice of the faithful into account both critically and creatively. *Quest* has sought to show how contemporary theologians have done just that.

In light of the above sources, I respectfully submit that *Quest for the Living God* does indeed

start with the faith of the church. It is written from faith for faith in the context of the church. The need for clarification on this point could well form the first talking points of dialogue: does the Statement take one model of the church and its faith and measure *Quest* against it in exclusionary rather than complementary terms? Simply put, what does the committee's Statement mean by "the faith of the church"?

## 2. God's Self-Disclosure

The faith of the church which frames this book is not self-initiated but arises in response to God's own loving self-disclosure. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the existence and dynamic of this radically free gift had been studied and organized in a systematically operative theology of revelation. This affirms that God has communicated God's own self to human beings; that this self-communication has a noetic character; that it discloses the divine plan of loving goodness to save all humankind. This happens through historical events and persons together with their interpretations, culminating in the whole event of Jesus Christ. Responding to this historically given divine revelation, faith, itself a grace, is the believing response to this word which enables people to entrust themselves wholly to God and to assent to the saving truth which God has revealed.

In several places (pp. 6, 9, 13, 14) the committee's Statement declares that the ideas of God proposed in *Quest* do not comport with revelation, "to which scripture and the apostolic tradition bear witness, and the church's teaching which interprets them." As with the issue of the faith of the church, these statements puzzle me. The reason is because at the core of every idea of God presented in this book is a biblical insight lifted up, newly recognized, and freshly received by some group of faithful people in the church, an insight which sheds new light on the revealed self-giving love of God and the divine plan of salvation.

*Quest's* understanding of revelation is shaped by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in *Dei Verbum*. There it is described as God's loving choice to speak to human beings as friends, showing forth and communicating God's own self and the hidden purpose of the divine will to save. Through the interplay of deeds and words in history this plan is realized, starting with our first parents, moving through the call of Abraham and the formation of the chosen people, and culminating in Jesus Christ. The historical nature of the process is further delineated by the narrative of how revelation is transmitted in

the centuries after Christ. Handed on to all generations through the apostolic preaching and the written scriptures, preached and spread in tradition, transmitted in the church through its teaching, life, and worship, and interpreted by the teaching office of the church which serves the word of God, revelation is God's way of sharing "those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind" (§6).

In keeping with this view, the constitution instructs that theology's soul should be the study of the sacred page, whose word powerfully rejuvenates the quest for understanding (§24). *Dei Verbum* furthermore underscores the necessity of interpreting scripture, including the gospels, according to the genre of their historical composition, thus forestalling any kind of fundamentalism of the text. In dealing with the dilemma that some biblical passages present scientific or historical data inconsistent with contemporary knowledge, *Dei Verbum* further clarifies the council's account of revelation. "The books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writing for the sake of our salvation" (§11). The official footnote quotes a text from Aquinas arguing that things which do not affect salvation do not belong to revelation in the doctrinal sense. As commentaries on this document note, the Bible was not written to teach natural science or political history; it treats of these insofar as they are involved in matters of salvation, which is the heart of what is being revealed. Salvation thus functions as a formal hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of scripture. This is underscored by the very first paragraph of *Dei Verbum*, which desires that by hearing the message of salvation "the whole world may believe; by believing it may hope; and by hoping, it may love." (§1)

In trying to figure out why the Statement found my book deficient in cohering with revelation, I turned again to Avery Dulles and his insight that in the postconciliar church there is a pluralism of theologies of revelation. In his *Models of Revelation* he presents six models being used in contemporary theology, namely revelation as doctrine, as history, as inner experience, as dialectical presence, as new awareness, and, presenting in the end his own preferred understanding, revelation as symbolic mediation. While agreeing on the teaching of the council about revelation delineated above, might the committee's Statement and *Quest* be working out of different models of revelation?

Let me illustrate this observation with the Statement's assessment of female images of God (to

which I will return below). The Statement rightly acknowledges that the images which *Quest* discusses, namely those clustered around divine maternity, Wisdom (Sophia), and Spirit (*ruah*), are found in the Bible. But then the Statement criticizes the book's account of how these ways of speaking about God are being used by feminist, womanist, *mujerista* and Latina theologies in the United States and around the world, saying:

“The names of God found in the Scriptures are not mere human creations that can be replaced by others that we may find more suitable according to our own human judgment. The standard by which all theological assertions must be judged is that provided by divine revelation, not by unaided human understanding.”

What is vastly puzzling is that far from being created by unaided human understanding, these female ways of envisioning God are part of inspired scripture. Therefore, by the Statement's own criteria, they are deserving of being considered part of revelation. Whence, then, comes this criticism? The critique states that I have eliminated as a criterion divine revelation to which scripture bears witness. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of my work. In fact what I have done is bring forth from scripture some precious images of God, long-neglected, but filled with the potential of revealing the saving love of God.

Upon re-reading my book I see one place where I could perhaps have been clearer. Before launching on the above criticism, the Statement quotes from *Quest* (109) the following summary:

In other words, women reflect God not only as mothering, nurturing, and compassionate, although certainly that, but also as powerful, taking initiative, creating-redeeming-saving, wrathful against injustice, in solidarity with the poor, struggling against and sometimes victorious over the powers of this world. Reorienting the imagination at a basic level, these female images open up insight into the maternal passion, fierce protectiveness, zeal for justice, healing power, inclusive hospitality, liberating will, and non-hierarchical, all-pervading relationality that characterize divine love. In the process, they carry back to women the stamp of divine likeness.

Perhaps it would have been helpful if the second sentence here had reiterated that all these female images of God can be found in the Bible. I presumed this was obvious from the previous seven pages of

examples (100-106), but maybe not. If the text had read “these female images *from scripture* open up insight ...,” would the charge that their use eliminates revelation still have arisen?

My observations here underscore the need for clarification on this matter and raise up another point about which it would be fruitful to dialogue: what does the committee’s Statement mean by revelation? Does this meaning render biblical female imagery for God invalid?

### 3. The Craft of Theology

Within the framework of the faith of the church arising in response to the treasure of God’s historical self-disclosure or revelation, theology, in Anselm’s classic description, is the effort of faith seeking understanding, *fides quaerens intellectum*, or the praxis of faith seeking understanding, in some more recent methodological approaches. The present participle *quaerens* signals that this is an ongoing project. The church moves forward in history, encountering new cultures and philosophies, grappling with new difficulties, benefitting from new discoveries, gaining new insights, all of which make necessary a conscious and methodical reflection on the meaning of faith from age to age. This disciplined reflection can be likened to a craft. It fashions a way of thinking that employs thought forms and linguistic terminology suitable to the era in which it works, in order to bring out faith’s meaning afresh. For “even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries” (*Catechism* §66).

Standing in this tradition, *Quest’s* chapters reflect how our era continues to contribute to the remarkably rich pluralism that characterizes the history of theology as a whole:

- ~Theology is crafted in historical periods: early Christian, medieval, modern, postmodern.
- ~It reflects geographically distinct cultures: East and West, as in trinitarian thought of Cappadocians and Augustine.
- ~It is dotted with schools of thought, sometimes clashing: Jesuits and Dominicans on grace and free will.
- ~Theology is connected with persons: Hildegard of Bingen, Edward Schillebeeckx.
- ~It is connected with topics: christology, theology of peace.
- ~It is connected with persons and topics together: John Paul II’s theology of the body.
- ~It works in different parts of the vineyard: biblical, historical, systematic, moral, spiritual, practical, ecumenical, apologetic, philosophical.
- ~It is pervaded with different passions: for mystical union, for intellectual clarity, for social justice.
- ~It is rooted in different imaginations: analogical, dialectical, liberationist.

~It works with different methods: deductive, inductive, transcendental, correlation, hermeneutical.

~It employs different philosophies: Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic, process, analytic, while not being tied to any one.

~It dialogues with the wisdom of different arts and sciences: literature, history, psychology, political theory, critical theory, ideology critique, cosmology, biology.

This description is not exhaustive. Indeed, university courses on the history of theology or the history of Christian thought cannot do justice to two thousand years of this work in one semester or even two. Lest the diversity seem chaotic, it should be noted that, as Karl Rahner writes in his essay “Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church” (*Theological Investigations XI*), the goal is always the same: within the community of the church, to seek the meaning of faith in order to believe, hope, and love more deeply.

I further observe that at times theology develops ideas that not only sustain the inquiring minds and committed praxis of the people of the church but also influence official church teaching itself. John Courtney Murray’s writings on the dignity of the human person whose individual conscience in religious matters should not be coerced, for example, helped shape the Second Vatican Council’s *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, which shifted centuries of teaching to the contrary. The best example in our day is the liberation theology of Latin America. As one of its esteemed originators, Gustavo Gutiérrez, has noted, seldom has an insight moved so quickly from the faith of the people to theology to church teaching as has the idea of God’s preferential option for the poor, now present in magisterial documents as a challenge to the church’s own practice. It is interesting to observe that this is one of the theologies presented in my book with which the Statement finds no fault. I wonder what other theologies in *Quest* may eventually have similar influence. For example, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (written 1566) says nothing about female images of God; the post-Vatican II *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (written 1992) indeed does (see below), reflecting new insights in theology which may or may not in time lead to the development of doctrine.

Standing on the shoulders of many giants, *Quest for the Living God* is a work of theology. Each of the insights presented emerges from “faith seeking understanding” in the particular vexing circumstances of a group of believers in the church. Each takes its bearing from scripture and refers in significant ways to Jesus Christ and the Spirit. Some are particularly interesting in that they bring new voices with their subjugated knowledge to the table, expanding the ranks of the theological guild. In my

judgment, they all offer a rich fare for those who want to think about their faith. There are other contemporary developments in theology of God which for reasons of time and expertise I did not include. But I wager that one hundred years from now when the history of theology in our era is written, these eight theologies will be included.

In view of this thick description of theology and the identity of *Quest* as a work of theology, I submit two further observations.

~ In our day with its intellectual practice of historical consciousness and ideology critique, theology at times asks about the relationship between the religious ideas of any era and the political constitution of its societies. In the face of massive suffering in the world, there is danger that a community's talk of God will ignore its implications for those being crushed, becoming privatized or triumphalistic. The Statement criticizes *Quest's* discussion of this issue, in particular its critique of monarchical notions of God, declaring that "the exercise of authority that flows from the traditional notion of God fosters truth, justice, equity, peace, and right order" (6). Indeed it should, and often, of course, it does. But the Jewish people killed during the Crusades, the women burned as witches by the Inquisition, the African slaves held in bondage in the Americas with church approval and participation, these and other examples make clear that the exercise of authority in the traditional name of God has not always been beneficial. As part of the church's millennium observations, Pope John Paul II felt moved to confess repentance for these and other such misdeeds. But a theologian may be permitted to ask: What was there in the prevailing idea of God that allowed and did not resist the violence? Convinced that the symbol of God functions, *Quest* traces the ethical practice that flows from each theology of God it presents in order to ascertain if justice, peace, and right order really are the result. The Statement (12) criticizes the book for testing the socio-political effects of God-talk. I suggest that in this regard theology has lost its innocence.

~ The Statement persists in identifying each theology presented in this book as "her own proposals." Would that I were that creative! As clarified above, this book reports about and explicates theological insights about God that have arisen in different sites of struggle around the world. In that sense, as the president of my university, Joseph McShane S.J., explained to our local ordinary, Archbishop Timothy Dolan, when he graciously met with us over this matter, "it is her Avery book."

Unlike Cardinal Dulles, I do not seek to make a synthesis of the various models but let them play out in their uniqueness. Like him, however, since I have judged these insights worthy of consideration, I do try to explain their context and rationale in the best possible manner. Unfortunately, the Statement configures my exposition of these views as though I had embarked on a grand conspiracy to destroy the church's faith and substitute my own proposals. Far from it. In truth, what *Quest* does is show how various theologies are expressing faith in God in a rich symphony of ideas and images.

This, then, brings up another set of questions for discussion: what does the committee's Statement understand theology to be? And how does the Statement interpret the pluralism of theologies that has existed historically and exists around the world today? And how does the Statement envision safeguarding the freedom of the theologian to explore, so that understanding of faith may continue to grow? If the Statement's conception of theology is different from that of *Quest* and those it presents, does that difference necessarily invalidate the way these theologies work or might they be complementary?

#### 4. Modern Theism

Given the distinctions in the three prior sections between faith, revelation, and theology, it is important to flag the Statement's discussion of modern theism. Right at the start, the Statement declares that *Quest* "begins with a critique of the Church's faith, or, rather of what she terms traditional theology" (2). It is the 'or, rather' that creates the subsequent misreading. For right here the Statement conflates faith with theology, which should be held distinct. The Statement then proceeds with the presupposition that the book wants to wipe out the faith of the church and replace it with radical new theological ideas. If that were truly the case, then I could see why the Committee on Doctrine would want to criticize the book. But nothing could be further from the truth.

As I present it in the book, "modern theism" is the name for a specific kind of *theology*. It arose in Europe during and after the Enlightenment when theologians used the kind of reasoning forged by Enlightenment philosophers to argue for the existence of God. Modern theism splits Aquinas's *quinque viae*/five ways of demonstrating the existence of God (*Summa* part I) from his treatment of the *via veritatis* who is Christ (*Summa* part III), ideas which Aquinas kept intact under the rubric of *sacra doctrina*. Consequently, it sketches a truncated metaphysical knowledge about God, drawing conclusions about God's relation to the world from concepts of divine qualities that have been obtained in the

abstract, apart from revelation. Rightly stressing a fundamental separation between God and the world, it does not incorporate into its basic view how God relates to the world in incarnation and grace. One finds this kind of theology in the manuals which formed the major textbooks of theology prior to the Second Vatican Council.

As it developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was then transposed into different keys, modern theism brackets revelation in its argument about the existence and attributes of God. In his distinguished study of the origins of this kind of theology (which *Quest* lists as one of its sources), Michael Buckley concludes, “It is not without some sense of wonder that one records that the theologians bracketed religion in order to defend religion.” A critical self-contradiction then developed within this kind of theology: “The unrecognized violence of this contradiction thus lay not only between the religious content and the philosophic form but also between the Christian god and the impersonal content that was counted as his primary evidence.” The Christian God is defined without Christ. “Christianity, in order to defend its god, transmuted itself into theism” (*At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, 345-46). It is this view of God delineated by modern theism that modern a-theism attacked.

During this period the faith of the church flourished in its spirituality, piety, devotion and ritual care, even while it was under stress from a growing culture of atheism. There were outstanding exceptions among theologians who thought differently. At its best, the preaching and teaching of the church also presented a more adequate notion of God. But the prevailing pattern of thought associated with modern theism is judged by many today to be inadequate. As Karl Rahner has observed, if one were to remove the Trinity from theological treatises of this era, it would barely make a difference.

*Quest for the Living God* (14-17) describes this development in brief, pinpointing what the book means by “modern theism.” It laments the way this view of God has gone on to become trivialized in contemporary popular culture, including its cavalier rejection by the so-called new atheists. It then alerts the reader that the theologies traced out in this book are departing from the method used by modern theism. Incorporating religious belief and practice at the outset, they are attempting new articulations of the belief that “God is Love” (1Jn 4:8), closer to the history and mess of the world than modern theism allowed. *Quests’* critique of modern theism is a critique of a curtailed theology in favor of a more vibrant tradition.

As the Statement notes (3), *Quest* rightly does not think modern theism represents classical Christian theology. The Statement also agrees with *Quest* that when the prevailing view of God resulting from modern theism presents a distant lawgiver who “stands at the summit of hierarchical power, reinforcing structures of authority in society, church, and family,” it is in need of reform. The book’s consistent appeal to scripture and theological tradition, however, contradicts the Statement’s judgment that I think modern theism is identical with the traditional Catholic understanding of God. Modern theism is the theology of one historical period.

I offer, then, this observation. The committee’s Statement conflates faith with theology. More specifically, it mistakenly attributes to *Quest* an equating of faith with a theological pattern known in the literature as modern theism. In doing so, it misreads at the outset what my book is about. It takes criticism of one particular school of thought - modern theism - as if it were a criticism of the ancient and medieval forms of faith, which it is not. Consequently, it attributes nefarious intent to the author. And it employs this error throughout the rest of its reading of the book.

It would be interesting to discuss whether the Committee on Doctrine agrees or not with the assessment that modern theism is inadequate. This would be an historical judgment, in any case, and not subject to the criticism that one’s view is against church teaching.

To bring this issue to questions for dialogue: What distinction does the committee recognize between the faith of the church and particular patterns of theology? What if any value does the committee see in theologians’ making critical judgments about past ways of doing theology? I myself learn from the strengths and weaknesses of past ways of doing our craft, as I expect theologians of the future will learn from the strengths and weakness of our era. How else can theology, like any intellectual discipline, advance?

##### 5. Speaking about the Living God: Religious Language

To guide the discussion to come, *Quest* presents ground rules for language about God, norms synthesized mainly from Aquinas’ writings but with backing in scripture. These are: first, God is infinite holy Mystery who can never be fully comprehended by our human minds; second, no human language is adequate to express this divine reality; and third, there need to be many names for God, each one opening up a different angle of vision. The Statement declares its agreement with all three, even observing that

*Quest* is “entirely correct” about the second.

It is vastly puzzling, then, that the Statement concludes that as a result of these three ground rules, I personally think it is impossible to know God or to make statements about God that are true. It claims that I maintain that any language about God will do; we can choose words for God haphazardly; none of it means much anyway, because like a Kantian skeptic I think our words do not attain to God.

Please allow a clarification which is in truth a correction of the committee’s Statement. I state categorically that I do not hold this position. I do not think this and never wrote it. Nowhere in the book can one find this stated either explicitly or implicitly. Indeed, the whole book is written with the opposite intent, to present the knowledge of the living God arising from different insights and practices of the faith in the church, knowledge which I judge to be true.

The Statement (6-10) begins its criticism with the heading “False Presupposition: All Names for God are Metaphors.” Again, to be absolutely clear: the book never makes this statement. To be sure, to say that all names for God are metaphors is one way to paraphrase the second ground rule in ordinary, everyday language (but the book does not say this). Biblical scholars, too, generally hold to the metaphorical character of words for God in scripture. In systematic theology, however, a layer of technical analysis exists regarding the nature of religious language, and here the above heading palpably misrepresents *Quest*.

To step back from the book for a moment: my position on the nature of religious language has from my early years followed the Catholic tradition on analogy. I did my doctoral dissertation on analogy, criticizing Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Barthian interpretation of analogy as always and everywhere collapsing into univocity. I have claimed analogy as the theory guiding my work in several scholarly publications translated into numerous languages. I have even debated the analogical nature of God-talk with a process theologian in open sessions at annual meetings of the Catholic Theological Society of America and the American Academy of Religion. So what I state here is no secret or sleight of hand. The heading stated above attributes to me a position I have simply never held. The proper heading would be: “True Presupposition: All Names for God Are Analogies.”

But the book must stand on its own feet. What do I write there? On pp. 18-19 *Quest* states that Catholic theology typically explains the indirect play of God-language by the theology of analogy, which

I then go on to explain. On pp. 19-20 *Quest* then presents the more typical Protestant position that God language is metaphor, which I also explain. On p. 20 I bring forth the more recent theory of symbol as discussed by Tillich and others. The conclusion is that whichever theory is used, they are all working with the second ground rule, using good, true, and beautiful aspects of creation to speak of the infinite Mystery who dwells within and embraces the world but always exceeds our grasp. To be sure, I do not claim analogy as my own position in these pages. But neither do I claim the metaphorical position. In any event, the point was not to argue one theory of religious language over against another, but to explain how all theories converge in affirming the limited nature of human language about God.

In trying to fathom why the Statement takes such umbrage at *Quest's* discussion of religious language, I wondered if at root it has to do with the way the book in fact describes analogy. Unlike Cajetan and other commentators on Aquinas who interpreted his work so as to give a substantialist meaning to God-language, twentieth century methods of reading Aquinas in his pre-nominalist, pre-Cartesian historical context have resulted in a strong recovery of the complexity of analogy including its negating moment. As seen in the work of David Burrell, William J. Hill, Eric Przywara, Herbert McCabe and others, this retrieval stresses the apophatic character of all concepts used analogously of creatures and God, thereby bringing Thomistic scholarship into accord with a genuine and long-standing Christian tradition. Could the Statement and *Quest* be working out of two different interpretations of Aquinas?

As I understand it, Aquinas positions analogy between univocity, where words have the exact same meaning for creatures and God, and equivocity, where they have no meaning at all in common. Since the creaturely world reflects something of its Creator, there is similarity but not identity in the same words used of creatures and God. Honoring this relationship of Creator and creation, Aquinas describes a supple movement of mind in which we first affirm a creaturely perfection of God; then negate the finite way we know that quality; and then reaffirm the creaturely perfection as belonging to God in a supereminent or excellent way.

Drilling down deeper as to how this works, scholars make a distinction between the perfection itself, *res significata*, and the mode in which it is known, *modus significandi*. At the end of the analogical process we attribute the *res* to God in an infinite way while acknowledging the finite *modus*, or the limited way of knowing commensurate with our earthly experience. Hence our mode of representing

what we are talking about, our concept of the perfection, does not match its mode of being in the reality of God. The concept is inadequate. And yet having used it, our minds arrive at insight via a judgment that this perfection is true of God superlatively. It is a judgment that breaks out of the finite mode of apprehension endemic to our creaturely way of knowing.

When performed within the context of faith, the analogical process does not lead to agnosticism. Its knowing is a dynamic kind of relational knowing, pervaded with religious awareness. It intuits an unspeakably rich and vivifying reality opened up by the intelligible content of the concept, even though at the same time God remains in essence conceptually inapprehensible. It is like when you love someone. No words can ever adequately express the mystery of the other person whom you love. If this is the case between two creatures, how much more of human words about the living God who is Love? Thus Aquinas can write:

The perfection of all our knowledge about God is said to be a knowing of the unknown, for then supremely is our mind found to know God when it most perfectly knows that the being of God transcends everything whatever that can be apprehended in this life (*In Boeth. de trin.* 1, 2).

Indeed, “we cannot know of God what He is, and thus we are united to Him as to one unknown” (*ST* q.12, a.13).

Returning to *Quest*: the text discusses how analogy “affirms, negates, and then negates the negation itself. This third step brings the mind through to a new affirmation of God, who transcends both assertion and negation” (18). Note that the book explicitly states that our words do affirm something of God. Then, after illustrating the process with the example ‘God is good,’ *Quest* writes about the result: “Human comprehension of the meaning of ‘good’ is lost, for we have no direct earthly experience of anything that is the Source of all goodness. Yet the very saying of it ushers our spirit toward the presence of God who is good, a reality so bright that it is darkness to our mind. In the end the play of analogy brings us to our knees in adoration” (19).

Having stated that I am incorrect in this, the Statement cites the *Catechism* as presenting the right teaching: “We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch.” And the quote continues, citing Aquinas: “The believer’s act of faith does not terminate in

propositions but in the realities which they express” (§170). But this is just what I present in different words but with the same meaning. Nowhere does *Quest* claim, as the Statement asserts it does, that human language does not attain to the reality of God. Rather, in its own words it reiterates the *Catechism*’s teaching that “Since our knowledge of God is limited, our language about him is equally so” (§40).

Still trying to figure out what the issue is here, I wondered if the Statement thought the three ground rules applied only to words about God arrived at by reason but not to those given by revelation. Again, this could not be the case. Describing the import of the revelation of the divine name YHWH to Moses, the *Catechism* writes: “This divine name is mysterious just as God is mystery. It is at once a name revealed and something like the refusal of a name, and hence it better expresses God as what he is - infinitely above everything that we can understand or say” (§206). Precisely.

In a similar vein, speaking of Jesus’ revelatory way of calling God *Abba*-Father, John Paul II writes that this name “points indirectly to the mystery of the eternal generating which belongs to the inner life of God. ... this generating has neither masculine nor feminine qualities. ... God is spirit and possesses no property typical of the body, neither feminine nor masculine. Thus even fatherhood in God is completely divine and free of the masculine bodily characteristics proper to human fatherhood.” Jesus’ calling God his Father is meant in an “ultracorporeal, superhuman, and completely divine sense” (*Mulieris Dignitatem* §8). I dare say that by this point no one has a clear, fixed concept of the fatherhood of God.

In writing about this subject at the beginning of *Quest*, I thought it was good and useful to alert readers to these ground rules. They awaken us to the awesome nature of the subject of the book. They inculcate intellectual humility. And they guard us from grasping, defining, or otherwise arrogantly presiding over the reality of God with our concepts. Nowhere does the book say, as the Statement alleges, that these ground rules mean that we cannot know God. Rather, they explicate the truth that we must “purify our language of everything in it that is limited, image-bound, or imperfect, if we are not to confuse our image of God - the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the invisible, the ungraspable - with our human representations. Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God.” (*Catechism* §42)

To conclude this observation: the Statement takes exception to *Quest*’s words that “the reality of

the living God is an ineffable mystery beyond all telling.” Yet in speaking of sacred art, the *Catechism* states that “truth can also find other complementary forms of human expression, above all when it is a matter of evoking what is beyond words: the depths of the human heart, the exaltations of the soul, the mystery of God” (§2500). The mystery of God is beyond all telling (*Quest*) or beyond words (*Catechism*) - where is the difference? I suggest there is none. I am still at a loss to understand, in light of *Quest*'s actual presentation, what triggered the Statement's misconstrual of my position.

This surfaces another talking point for dialogue, perhaps best phrased this way: what does the Statement understand to be the nature of our language about God? I suspect we have a great deal of common ground here. Pressing the issue further, how does the committee's Statement think to distinguish analogy from univocity? Here there might be technical differences.

#### 6. A Suffering God

The Statement takes issue with *Quest*'s discussion of the contemporary, post-Holocaust question about whether and to what extent God suffers with the agony of the world. On the one hand, *Quest* presents those like Edward Schillebeeckx and Johannes Baptist Metz who hold that while God is compassionate toward those who suffer, suffering does not touch the being of God. On the other hand, it also presents thinkers such as Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Soelle who hold in their different ways that God indeed suffers, on the cross and beyond. I find this one of the most important and fascinating discussions in contemporary theology. For many years my own mind, formed by the tradition of impassibility, assumed the former position. But then something happened that made me question this teaching as an absolute beyond some qualification. Let me tell you the story.

In 1987 I was invited by the South African Catholic Bishops Conference to be the lecturer in their annual Winter School aimed at updating clergy on some aspect of theology. My subject was christology, and the project entailed delivering the same set of lectures for a week at a time in six different locations. To crush opposition to apartheid, the government at the time had declared a state of emergency. Many priests had been detained in prison, some interrogated under torture for their pastoral activity. Some had presided at funerals where mourners were shot by the military. Even to preach a homily in a black township on the theme of God's love was to incur the wrath of the government, for such words gave dignity to the people. Fear was in the air; violence an ever-present reality. During Q &

A periods as priests and bishops spoke of their experiences, and during liturgies when laments poured out, I became aware that here was a church of confessors and martyrs akin to that of the early church.

Toward the end of the first week I delivered a lecture on the cross, including contemporary views *pro* and *con* the idea of the “crucified God.” In the lively discussion that followed, I asked for a show of hands as to which position made more sense to them, Schillebeeckx’s or Moltmann’s. Every hand but one went up for Moltmann. I was dumbfounded. I had gone to South Africa assuming that the tradition of impassibility was unquestionably right. The judgment of bishops and priests who suffered for the gospel in ways I could hardly imagine made me stop and ask what was going on here in these people of faith. For them, as for the imprisoned Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “only a suffering God can help” (*Letters and Papers from Prison*, July 16, 1944). This result was repeated in subsequent weeks, with passionate affirmations. I returned from this beloved country with a new question, born of the suffering and spiritual experience of these good men.

Subsequent study made it clear that the Bible has no hesitation in attributing *pathos* to God ~ grief, weeping, lament. The key event of the revelation of the divine name to Moses at the burning bush begins with YHWH’s words: “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know well what they are suffering; therefore I have come down to deliver them ...” (Ex 3:7-8). Biblical scholars point out that the Hebrew verb ‘know’ in this text is the same used in Genesis where we read, “And the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain” (4:1). Here and in many other instances the Hebrew verb indicates something more than simply rational knowing, something akin to an experiential kind of knowing. YHWH sees and hears the pain, and feels it, and so comes to liberate. This is the narrative in which the sacred name is revealed, and with which it is forever connected.

Christianity’s encounter with the philosophy of Hellenism brought with it the idea of impassibility, necessitating that early church theologians try to figure ways to marry Hebrew and Greek perspectives. This they did with greater or less success. Could there not be a way, I asked myself, to reclaim the biblical view of divine *pathos* while still safeguarding the transcendence of God which the concept of impassibility rightly aims to protect?

I found that the work of Abraham Heschel, which *Quest* presents (56-58), offers one way. To

protect divine freedom, Heschel reflects that *pathos* is not a *necessary* divine attribute, one that belongs to the eternal God as infinite. But in view of Israel's history it is *in fact* how God freely chooses to respond to the human dilemma, namely, with sympathetic engagement. *Pathos* has the quality of an ethical category, a stance of living care. To say that God is compassionate, feelingly and concretely concerned, is to say that God freely cares about human well-being for all, which includes especially those ground down as victims of historic injustice. Hence to call God a God of *pathos* is not a psychological claim but a theological one. Like all theological language it is inadequate. But it is not false as a way to illuminate God's compassion.

The Statement criticizes *Quest's* presentation of the suffering God which proceeds along these lines. It says I am presenting it as a viable alternative to traditional Catholic teaching. Here an interesting fact presents itself. At the very time that my book was under review, Cardinal Walter Kasper, at that time President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (now *Emeritus*) and himself a distinguished theologian, gave a public lecture on God at the Aquinas Center at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Counterposing the challenge to faith posed by modern atheism with the trinitarian doctrine of God who is Love, he raised the question of the suffering God. Traditional theology, he said, has understood suffering as a deficit and thereby excluded the possibility that God could suffer. But, he continued, on this point a shift has occurred in a large part of modern theology, citing here half a dozen major Catholic theologians including Hans Urs von Balthasar. In Kasper's words on behalf of the suffering God, available online:

Self-evidently, if God suffers he does not suffer in a human but in a divine manner. For God's suffering cannot be something external that befalls him. God's suffering cannot be a passive accident, nor can it be the expression of a deficiency, but only the expression of sovereign self-determination. God is not passively affected by the suffering of his creatures; he allows himself in freedom to be affected by the suffering of his creatures; he allows himself to be moved by sympathy (Ex 34:6); indeed, as the prophet says, his heart recoils in the face of the misery of his creatures (Hos 11:8). He is not an apathetic but a sympathetic God, i.e., a God who can *sym-pathein*, who suffers with us.

The Cardinal is affirming God's suffering and at the same time protecting God from being limited

because of it: divine suffering is part of and flows out of God's infinite active loving.

*Quest's* presentation of the God who suffers is well within the parameters of this contemporary Catholic theological discussion, which seeks alternative ways of preserving the import of divine impassibility without making it sound as if God were apathetic. In truth, I myself am inclined toward a both-and position on this question rather than an either-or, seeing value in the tension between biblical God-language and Greek metaphysics, as the text of *Quest* itself indicates.

Thus we arrive at another point for dialogue: in view of the biblical witness, might not the doctrine of divine impassibility admit of more nuanced interpretation, the likes of which we find in Cardinal Kasper's theological reflections? Could it not be that due to the insight and practice of people in the church including pastors and bishops, the reflection of theologians over these past decades, and especially the re-rooting of theology in scripture, we are witnessing a development in this area of doctrine?

#### 7. Female Images of God

The Statement criticizes *Quest* for saying that traditional masculine language and concepts of God should be *replaced* by feminine ones. Please allow a clarification which is in truth a correction of the committee's Statement. I state categorically that I do not hold this position. I do not think this and never wrote it. Nowhere in the book can one find such a substitution called for either directly or indirectly. To the contrary, in presenting female images of God, *Quest* affirms: "This is not to say that male metaphors cannot be used to signify the divine. Men, too, are created, redeemed, and sanctified by the gracious love of God, and images taken from their lives can function in as adequate or inadequate a way as do images taken from the lives of women" (99). Instead of wanting to *replace* the church's traditional language for God, *Quest* is suggesting ways in which it can be *expanded*.

The book's discussion takes its cue from a pair of parables told by Jesus in Luke's gospel. In the first, a shepherd with 100 sheep loses one, leaves the 99 to search for it, and rejoices with neighbors when he succeeds (15:3-7). In the other which immediately follows:

Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin

that I had lost.” Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (15: 8-10).

After analyzing the shepherd story, the *Jerome Biblical Commentary* writes that the parable of the lost coin “has the same lesson as the first.” These two are “parables of mercy,” having in common the teaching of God’s redeeming search for sinners. As *Quest* observes (106), both of these parables are imaginatively crafted by Jesus to depict the work of God the Redeemer, one using a male and one using a female figure. Despite the fact that tradition has favored the shepherd, the sweeping woman is just as revelatory of divine compassion. Would the church not benefit by expanding its repertoire of beloved images of God to include this searching woman? The Statement’s criticism of *Quest* for supposedly wanting to *replace* the church’s traditional language for God simply misses the mark. It attributes to me a position that I reject in *Quest* and in every other writing I have done on the subject.

The Statement further criticizes the book’s discussion of female images for God for lacking “any sense of the essential centrality of divine revelation as the basis of Christian theology.” Here I reiterate and expand upon my puzzlement already stated in section 2 above. The Statement rightly acknowledges that *Quest’s* discussion of feminine images of God focuses on those found in the Bible, in particular images that cluster around maternity, Holy Wisdom (Sophia), and *ruah* (Spirit). Insofar as scripture conveys the word of God revealed for the sake of our salvation, is it not the case that biblical language, narratives, and imagery communicate divine revelation? And if female images of God are part of that testimony, as *Quest* demonstrates, are they not legitimate witnesses of revelation? And is it not permitted that they form part of the repertoire of language about God within the community of faith? Is the church not permitted to use the language of Jesus when speaking about God?

Reflecting theologically on this language in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem - On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, Pope John Paul II explained that the Genesis stories of the creation of man and woman teach that “both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God’s image” (§6). Indeed, thanks to the personal character of human being, “both man and woman are like God” (§7). This identity is key for understanding biblical revelation, he continues, which uses characteristics of both men and women to speak about God. This anthropomorphic language has limits, of course, because God is in essence totally other. Still, citing passages from the prophets and the psalms,

the Pope declares that texts that speak of God with masculine or feminine qualities give “indirect confirmation of the truth that both man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God” (§8).

This insight comes to more succinct expression in the *Catechism* which, likewise citing prophets and psalms, states that “God’s parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood” (§239); and again, “In no way is God in man’s image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective ‘perfections’ of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband” (§370).

As an example of good use that takes biblical language and applies it in a new setting, *Quest* (102) adduces the remarks of Pope John Paul I on the occasion of the Camp David peace talks taking place between Israeli and Palestinian representatives. Comparing war to a fevered illness, the Pope observed:

God is our father. Even more God is our mother. God does not want to hurt us, but only to do good for us, all of us. If children are ill, they have additional claim to be loved by their mother. And we too, if by chance we are sick with badness and are on the wrong track, have yet another claim to be loved by the Lord.

With a mother’s love the living God keeps vigil through the long night of war, trying everything to break the violent fever and bring about peace.

The puzzling thing is that female images found in scripture are criticized as being against church teaching, while other non-biblical images, such as the African American image that ‘God is black,’ are not so criticized. I have tried to fathom why the Statement finds this female language so objectionable, and wonder if it is due to the fact that these images have come newly into speech mainly by the efforts of women. I could be wrong about this. But this is indeed a new phenomenon in the history of Christianity. Long silent and invisible in shaping the public culture of the church, baptized members of the community of the church who are women are trying to reclaim the fullness of their theomorphic and christomorphic identity. Some among them have joined the theological guild. In their work of seeking to understand faith, they have re-discovered biblical passages that speak about God in female terms, and have found in prayer the power of this language to affirm the human dignity of women who are “like God.” It is a

beautiful discovery. And since the symbol of God functions powerfully in the faith community, this usage can both enrich the church's appreciation of the mystery of the living God and encourage efforts to promote the flourishing of women made in the divine image. Thus does *Quest* present the spiritual discoveries made by many good women, and the scholarship that backs them up.

In light of the presence of female images for God in scripture, I am truly at a loss to understand why the Statement writes, "The names of God found in scriptures are not mere human creations that can be replaced by others we find more suitable according to our own human judgment" (13). That is clearly not what this book is doing, for it is bringing forth female ways of speaking about God found in scripture. And in the light of the use of female images for God by popes and the *Catechism*, I cannot fathom the Statement's criticism that *Quest* eliminates divine revelation, to which scripture and the apostolic tradition bear witness, and the church's teaching which interprets them. The Statement appears to be writing about some other book.

This leads to another point for dialogue. Is it permissible to use female imagery, along with male, animal, and cosmic imagery, for the incomprehensible God, or not? By what criteria would the Statement make this decision?

#### 8. The Generous God of the Religions

The Statement declares that *Quest* holds the position that all religions are equally salvific. Please allow a clarification which is in truth a correction of the committee's Statement. I state categorically that I do not hold this position. I do not think this and never wrote it. Nowhere in the book can one find this either stated either explicitly or implicitly. Yes, following church teaching since the Second Vatican Council, the book affirms the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions, resulting in "spiritual and moral goods" (*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions -Nostra Aetate* §2). But nowhere does the text predicate an equivalence between Christianity and any other religion.

In addition, while noting that *Quest* indeed affirms that Jesus provides a "unique" encounter with God and is "normative" and "constitutive" for salvation, the Statement criticizes the text for denying the uniqueness of Jesus as the Incarnate Word. Contrary to this misreading, let me draw attention to the constructive section of this chapter. This begins by staking out the position that "sees Jesus as the incarnate Word, crucified and risen" and explains:

In Christian faith, Jesus Christ is *the* sacrament of this two-way encounter. Wishing to unite with the human race in its joys, sinfulness, and terrible suffering in order to save, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us as a human being. Through his life, death, and resurrection God has forged a saving bond with the human race that cannot be broken. The cross brings God's love into the depths of our death; Christ's risen humanity is the pledge of life for all into the eternal future. God thereby posits the incarnate Word in history in order to signal a broader economy, the presence of God's saving will coextensive with the history of humankind. (176)

Nor is this mere window dressing. The heart of the argument is that this revelation is a "treasure," and the text continues: "Christians need not, indeed must not, abandon the faith that Jesus is in person Wisdom made flesh whose advent holds saving significance for the whole of humankind, nor stop explaining to others the beauty of the gospel and its effect on our lives" (177). I am wondering how much more explicit the Statement requires a text to be.

But perhaps the difficulty is not that the book denies that Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, which it does not, but that it goes on to suggest that the incarnation in Jesus Christ does not mean that others are deprived of God's gracious presence and action. This position, however, is in accord with church teaching. Starting with the Second Vatican Council every church document that deals with the religions in fact affirms the presence of God at work outside the boundaries of the institutional church. *Nostra Aetate* famously declared, "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions;" rather, the church looks with sincere respect on their beliefs and practices which, though different, "nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people" (§2). The council's *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes)* likewise affirms salvific "elements of truth and grace" in the religions "as a sort of secret presence of God" (§9), noting that Christians themselves "can learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth" (§11).

On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these decrees, Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio* explicitly states that God "does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main

and essential expression” (§55). Even *Dominus Iesus*, which strongly posits the centrality of Christ in the face of relativism, avers that various religious traditions “offer religious elements which come from God” (§21). The documentation could go on and on. Clearly, according to church teaching, belief in Jesus as the incarnate Word does not cancel out the presence of God in the other religions. The Statement describes negatively the idea in *Quest* that the church has grown in understanding and appreciation of other religions. But on what basis would the Statement want to argue the opposite?

Here is where the church in Asia, thanks to its experience as a little flock amid majority religions, is leading the theological conversation, giving the rest of the church a glimpse of what I call the generous God of the religions. *Quest* cites episcopal conferences of India, Korea, and the Philippines regarding the sense of the Sacred found in Asian traditions; it presents insights these conferences gain as they explore the mystery of God’s self-revelation, known in Jesus Christ, at work in the different ways of the religions. The book recounts my own startling encounter with the power of Hindu symbols used in an approved Eucharistic rite during a conference in India on Christ and the savior figures of other faiths sponsored by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (173). That liturgy, and the whole experience of the church in India which I discovered during that conference, rearranged the furniture of my mind, casting more sharply the question of how to reconcile the centrality of Jesus Christ with God’s work in other religions.

On one level, the issue is fascinating in an intellectual sense. As an avowed westerner who thinks in a linear line of logic, I stretch to understand the Asian way of inclusive thinking that holds: Rather than saying ‘A is true so B must be false,’ the Asian tends to say ‘A is true and B is also true in some sense.’ For the westerner, that would imply that truth is relative. But such is not the case, suggests the Theological Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences in their document on theological method (2000). Rather, truth is one but multidimensional: “There is but one Truth; but Truth is a Mystery which we approach reverently while seeking to understand its various aspects and dimensions.” Instead of either-or, one hopes to understand both-and, and in different ways. *Quest* presents a series of models in which these options are being worked out in contemporary theology.

On another level, this question is also fascinating because it stretches the heart to be attuned to God’s action in the world in places where we had not previously noticed, as with the poor, with victims

of genocide, with women. The Statement criticizes *Quest's* way of engaging with this issue as being due to my idea of God as Mystery whose being and fullness are without end. For one thing, I thought the Statement had agreed on the first ground rule that God is indeed infinite Mystery (section 5 above). But more importantly, this issue arises from the faith of the church as believers in Jesus Christ and their pastors encounter the wideness of God's mercy in the people of other faiths.

This surfaces another vital point for dialogue: how does the Statement interpret the universal saving will of God and the presence of the Spirit of God in other religions? Might it not be that "there is growth in understanding of these realities" (*DV* §8), as witnessed in church documents of the last half century? By what criteria should this be adjudicated?

#### 9. Creator Spirit in the Evolving World

In this chapter *Quest* reaches the frontier where theology is engaging contemporary science. The Statement levies two criticisms against its discussion, one concerning panentheism, the other dealing with evolution and human persons.

Regarding the first, the Statement rightly observes that the book underscores both the transcendence and immanence of God vis-à-vis the world. But then it judges that by introducing the model of panentheism to illuminate the God-world relationship, *Quest* makes the world "ontologically constitutive of God's own being." Let me make a clarification that is also a correction of the committee's Statement in the strongest possible terms. I do not think this and never wrote it. Nor does the mental model of panentheism necessitate such a conclusion. Certain instances of process theology which operate with the pantheistic model do make the world necessary for God and might warrant this critique. But while learning a great deal from this school of thought, I am not a process theologian. Formed by scripture as interpreted by Aquinas, my understanding has always posited the ontological distinction between God and the world.

The category panentheism (all-in-God) has been developed precisely to delineate and demarcate a view different from pantheism (all [is] God). As used in contemporary theology, it provides a third option between theism and pantheism, one which gives stronger play to divine immanence than does modern theism, while maintaining the absolute transcendence of God which pantheism does not. By definition, panentheism is "the belief that the being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe,

so that every part of it exists in Him, but as against pantheism, that his being is more than, and is not exhausted by, the universe" (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*). Karl Rahner's *Dictionary of Theology* notes further that pantheism is heretical only if it denies creation and the distinction of the world from God, which *Quest* obviously does not do.

As the title of this chapter indicates, my main interest lies in bringing pneumatology back into the discussion of the relation of God and the world, to ask about divine presence in the evolving world. It seems to me that the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit is a largely untapped resource that could help theology think through the doctrine of creation in light of recent scientific discoveries. Pantheism as a model lends itself to this retrieval. *Quest* (188) declares that "The mystery of the living God, utterly transcendent, is also the creative power who dwells at the heart of the world sustaining every moment of its evolution." The book goes on to suggest that the Spirit not only dwells within the world but also surrounds our emerging, struggling, living, dying, and renewing planet of life and the whole universe itself. It illustrates this with Luther's great image of God in and around a grain; with Augustine's magnificent image of the whole creation like a finite sponge floating in an infinite sea, necessarily filled in its every pore with water; and with the beautiful image of the pregnant female body (backed up by Moses' reprimand of the Israelites' infidelity: "you forgot the God who gave you birth" - Deut 32:18). These are all heuristic images that help theology explore divine immanence. As *Quest* explains, they increase understanding of the utterly transcendent God who yet is not far from us, being the One "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). It is interesting that the Statement also cites this biblical text but neither credits *Quest's* exploration of its meaning nor presents its own understanding of this text. But the "in whom" opens the door to the model of pantheism: God in the world and the world encircled by God who infinitely transcends the world.

Examining this chapter again, I see that perhaps it would have forestalled its misunderstanding of pantheism if *Quest* had stated explicitly that creation is God's free gift, a gratuitous act of love and thus not necessary. I assumed this, given the book's basic understanding of God, as this excerpt indicates:

the Creator Spirit dwells at the heart of the natural world, graciously energizing its evolution from within, compassionately holding all creatures in their finitude and death, and drawing the world forward toward an unimaginable future. Throughout the vast

sweep of cosmic and biological evolution, the Spirit embraces the material root of life and its endless new potential, empowering the cosmic process from within. The universe, in turn, is self-organizing and self-transcending, energized from the spiraling galaxies to the double helix of the DNA molecule by the dance of divine vivifying power (191).

Far from making the world ontologically necessary to God, *Quest's* discussion of the Spirit's presence and activity explores the transcendent God's free and intimate relation with the world.

The Statement criticizes *Quest* for its brief treatment of the evolution of human beings. Let me reiterate that the text never takes issue with anything the church teaches on this point. What it does is bring this belief into dialogue with the contemporary theory of evolution, a dialogue encouraged by Pope John Paul II: "Does an evolutionary perspective bring any light to bear upon theological anthropology, the meaning of the human person as *imago Dei*, the problem of Christology, and even upon the development of doctrine itself?" (*Message to the Vatican Observatory*, 1988). *Quest* has listened carefully to the scientific account of the evolution of the human species. This account sees human emergence as being of a piece with the whole story of the evolution of life on this planet, *scientifically speaking*. Matter evolves to life and then to consciousness and then to self-consciousness, and this can be accounted for without positing divine intervention, *scientifically speaking*.

What to make of this, theologically? If one has a radically dualistic idea of matter and spirit, a way forward is difficult. However, Rahner's work in his book *Hominisation* and elsewhere argues for the idea that matter has been gifted by its Creator with the power of active self-transcendence. This means that "a development of the material in the direction of spirit and the self-transcendence of the material into the spirit is, both philosophically and in the Christian sense, a legitimate conception" ("Unity of Spirit and Matter in the Christian Understanding of Faith," *Theological Investigations* VI). I myself think it would be fruitful to pair this idea with primary and secondary causality, so that God accomplishes the creation of the human species in and through the processes of nature itself. But I am still thinking about this.

In any event, the point of this chapter is not to resolve this question. Rather, it is to present the scientific account which establishes an unbreakable biological and historical link between human beings and the rest of the natural world. Human beings are created by God as an indigenous part of the

community of life. We need to see ourselves as truly earthlings, "a unique strand in the cosmos, yet still a strand of the cosmos" (185). The goal in view is ecological responsibility.

My observation here is that once again the Statement has taken texts of *Quest* out of context. Ignoring the issue being discussed, the Statement criticizes the book because it does not articulate all of church teaching on a given point. Certainly, there is a time and place for doing just that. But I respectfully suggest that an exploration of the presence and activity of God in light of new scientific knowledge is not that place.

Another question for dialogue now presents itself. How does the Statement envision theology being invigorated and informed by scientific discoveries of today?

#### 10. Trinity: The Living God of Love

The last chapter of my book sums up the preceding ones by exploring theology of the Triune God, whose salvific engagement with the world they all recount in some way.

Citing the connection *Quest* makes between the Trinity and the salvific mystery that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16), the Statement judges that I wish to limit our understanding of God to the economy of salvation. Let me state categorically that here again the Statement attributes to me something foreign to my understanding. I do not think this and never wrote this, in *Quest* or any other publication. I am simply following one of the great developments in contemporary trinitarian theology and returning to scripture in order to root this doctrine of God precisely in the history of revelation which gave rise to it. To start with the economy of salvation in no way means that theology cannot move to consideration of the immanent Trinity, the two being deeply intertwined. Such is an unwarranted conclusion, as Rahner's axiom which guides my own thinking underscores: "the Trinity of the economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity, and vice-versa." That *Quest* does not in fact discuss the immanent Trinity coheres with its purpose as a work of theology aiming to tease out the existential significance of belief in the Trinity for readers from whom this meaning is largely hidden.

Again, noting the book's use of biblical language about Jesus Christ, such as Jesus is God's self-revelation, the true Wisdom of God sent to save and set free, the Statement judges that this language is inadequate. Instead, it argues: "Jesus is ontologically the eternal Son of the Father. Only the second understanding affirms a true metaphysical Incarnation" (18). Certainly, if the purpose here were to affirm

the incarnation within certain philosophical presuppositions, then the Statement's point would be well-taken. However, this section of the chapter is tracing the historical origin of the doctrine of the Trinity from early Christians' appreciation of Jesus' relation to his Father up through the Arian controversy, culminating in the Nicene confession "God from God, light from light, true God from true God," which *Quest* quotes (204-206). In such a context, using biblical and creedal language about the divinity of Christ, I submit, is entirely appropriate. Stated another way, if the phrase "ontologically the eternal Son of the Father" is the only way to affirm "a true metaphysical incarnation," then none of the New Testament authors affirms such a truth. Even classic Christian theologians who are considered doctrinally orthodox, for example Athanasius, upholder of Nicea, would not pass this test.

The Statement's criticism at this point, however, is telling. In working with it I began to glimpse more clearly what perhaps has been the Statement's main problem with the book all along. Certainly, the teaching of councils such as Nicea, Constantinople I, and Chalcedon is authoritative. The trinitarian and christological confessions of these councils have provided a touchstone for centuries of theological interpretation ever since, and nothing *Quest* presents departs from their meaning. It appears, however, that the Committee on Doctrine holds that certain formulas such as "Jesus is ontologically the eternal Son of the Father" must be explicitly used and a specific metaphysical system adopted in order for any discussion to pass muster. This assumption has the effect of a drowned continent swirling all the currents above it while remaining itself invisible. No matter what the context or the question under review, the basic truth must be expressed in an explicitly determined set of words, words assumed to have a certain a-historical, unchanging meaning, or it is judged to be not in accord with Catholic teaching. These precise phrases themselves, such as the one above, are not biblical, creedal, or conciliar. Could it be said that this demand presented by the Statement is like neo-scholastic theology insofar as it focuses on certain propositions as the litmus test for right-thinking theology? If this is really the case, it would be a form of fundamentalism, not of the Bible, nor of doctrine, but of one later hermeneutic of doctrine.

I could be wrong, and would be happy to be disabused of this assessment. The Statement's declaration that only certain language is acceptable in a work of theology, however, suggests otherwise. In which case, I would like to respectfully ask: why? The *Catechism* and other compendia are there for all to see and learn from. The purpose of theology is not necessarily to repeat these formulas in every

instance, but to explain them, to unpack their meaning, to find ways to express their meaning in new conceptual frameworks. Besides everything already said in these observations about the craft of theology and its hermeneutical function, I cite here John Paul II's words in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*: "As an understanding of revelation, theology has always had to respond in different historical moments to the demands of different cultures, in order then to mediate the content of faith in a coherent and conceptually clear way. Today too ..." (§92). This entails more than the simple repetition of formulas, true though they be. Such confinement of theology's language to set formulas would fly in the face of the whole history of theology, stopping in its tracks theology's work of seeking understanding in *this* historical moment. To borrow a metaphor, insisting on such a norm would be akin to a referee changing the rules in the middle of the game.

Regarding the doctrine of the Trinity itself, the Statement reiterates its previous critique that I think trinitarian language does not provide actual knowledge of God. However, this whole chapter is written with the contrary assumption. It begins and ends with the Pauline greeting, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:13), and in between spends every effort to explain how the Trinity is the Christian form of monotheism. *Quest* discusses the name of God as "the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," noting how this articulation stabilizes Christian understanding of God, and affirming its value for liturgical use (217-18). It is true that *Quest* discusses how classical authors warned against taking trinitarian language as literally descriptive: one and three do not refer to numbers in the usual sense; 'person' does not give a complete explanation but allows us not to remain silent (Augustine); they are "three I-know-not-what" (*tres nescio quid* - Anselm). This is not to deny Christian knowledge of God. But it does remind the reader that language about God, while disclosive and true, can never be commensurate with the Mystery it finitely and beautifully seeks to express.

*Quests*'s position finds interesting affirmation in the *Catechism*. In the eleventh century the church split into Eastern and Western branches over the disputed question of the *filioque* ("and the Son"). This term expressed the Western view that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, as distinct from the Eastern view that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. Writing about these different ways of formulating the inner-trinitarian relations, the *Catechism* teaches that both are acceptable. "This

legitimate complementarity, provided it does not become rigid, does not affect the identity of faith in the reality of the same mystery confessed" (§248). Even with regard to such a momentous matter as the inner life of the Trinity, i.e. the relations between the trinitarian persons themselves, different manners of expression are permitted, a clear indication that trinitarian formulas are not exact definitions. I would like to ask the Committee on Doctrine: on what basis is *Quest* being held to a different standard?

Hans Urs von Balthasar's statement about the status of knowledge expressed in trinitarian language sums up Catholic tradition and my own position:

the statement therefore that God is 'triune', all this is and remains discourse about incomprehensible mystery. It is only analogously (where the similarity is overruled by a greater dissimilarity!) that we can speak of persons in God; only analogously (where the similarity is overruled by a greater dissimilarity!) that we can speak of 'begetting' and either 'spiration' or 'breathing forth'; only analogously (where the similarity is overruled by a greater dissimilarity!) that we can speak of 'three', for what 'three' means in relation to the absolute is in any case something quite other than the inner worldly 'three' of a sequence of numbers. (*Reader*, 186)

Even in revelation the Triune God is greater than human language, which speaks truthfully but but not exhaustively. Rejoicing in this holy Mystery, *Quest's* stated aim in this chapter is the theological one of explaining how this language is meaningful "for the sake of our salvation" (*DV* 11).

This brings up one more pertinent question for dialogue. Does the Committee on Doctrine really hold that works of theology must always and everywhere express their thinking in certain predetermined formulas taken from neo-scholasticism? If so, it would be helpful to clarify who decided this, and when, and by what criteria. If so, it would also be important to discuss how such a requirement departs from the whole time-honored history of theology, whose mandate is to seek understanding in different cultures in coherent and conceptually clear ways.

### Conclusion

These final observations step beyond the texts of the Statement and *Quest for the Living God* and consider several wider issues.

By now it has become clear what my brief public statement meant when it referred to

misrepresentations, misinterpretations, and an incorrect picture of my book in the committee's Statement. At the outset the Statement makes several erroneous moves that jeopardize the accuracy of its judgment: deciding that the book did not start with the faith of the church; interpreting my critique of the theological position known as modern theism as criticism of the faith of the church; and misconstruing my position on religious language as leading to Kantian skepticism. In addition, overlooking the fact that this book shares with readers the fruit of different avenues of scholarship developing in the church today, the Statement presents each succeeding view of God as "her radical revision" (6). Given these initial misreadings, what follows was almost bound to miss the mark. Ideas are taken out of context and twisted to mean what they patently do not mean. Sentences are run to a conclusion far from what I think or the text says. False dilemmas are composed. Numerous omissions, distortions, and outright misstatements of fact riddle the reading. As a work of theology, *Quest for the Living God* was thoroughly misunderstood and consistently misrepresented in the committee's Statement. As a result, the Statement's judgment that *Quest* does not cohere with Catholic teaching is less than compelling. It hangs in the air, untethered by the text of the book itself.

To use a judicial metaphor: the fact that *Quest for the Living God* was brought up on charges by person or persons unknown, put on a year-long trial, and found guilty before I was ever informed adds to the problematic aspect of the Statement's appearance. In my view, it would have been better to have this dialogue prior to the release of the Statement. Then, if the Committee on Doctrine still wished to make a statement, it would at least be based on an accurate reading of what the book actually says.

Simple human courtesy would indicate that springing such a public critique without warning is neither a generous nor respectful way to treat an adult. Were it not for the graciousness of Archbishop Timothy Dolan, my local bishop, I would have found out about the Statement online or in the newspaper. It is no disparagement to the episcopal office to suggest that the committee might have garnered less criticism from scholars and the reading public if it had followed a more dialogical procedure.

Furthermore, in a letter to the Fordham University faculty cited in the press, Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M. Cap., Executive Secretary of the Committee on Doctrine, wrote that the critique of the book "in no way calls into question the dedication, honor, creativity, or service of its author." This is interesting to know, because the Statement's harsh tone, disparaging words, ridicule, and rhetoric of fear certainly

created that impression in my own mind and in the view of the public at large. A better path, it seems to me, would have been for the Statement to follow the common saying cited by John XXIII in his first encyclical: “in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.”

As a result of these observations, I admit to curiosity about the process followed by the Committee on Doctrine to arrive at the Statement. Did each of the nine bishop members or their theologians read the book and draw up notes? Did they discuss the points to be made and debate them *pro* and *con*? Did they vote on the final document? I ask because of my work on faculty and professional committees, where factual distortions are called into question and positions change as people hear each other’s arguments. The numerous misreadings of *Quest* flagged in these observations makes me query if the committee might not find a more satisfactory way of proceeding to assure more accurate outcomes.

I am glad to know the Committee on Doctrine did not ban my book. Over-zealous editors with a love for alliteration created variations of the headline “Bishops Ban Book,” but Thomas Weinandy O.F.M. Cap. is cited in the *New York Times* as saying that the bishops have no authority to mandate that books be removed from college classrooms.

That being said, it is interesting to note that I did not write *Quest for the Living God* to be used as a textbook. If that were the goal, the book would have been written differently. As stated in its Introduction, *Quest* is written for a broad audience of thinking, seeking, committed, teaching, preaching adults as nourishment for their own mature faith. The fact that it is being used in whole or part in college and university courses indicates a professorial judgment that young adults could benefit from critical engagement with theological conversations actually taking place in the church today. College curricula typically include critical literary hermeneutics, complex economic and political theory, postcolonial accounts of history, sociological analysis, pragmatic philosophical approaches, gender theory, and the practice of scientific methods. In view of the sophisticated study students make in other disciplines, presenting religion in a simplistic way would be deadly. Rather than simply imparting information to be appropriated, theology in the college and university setting aims to *think*: it invites students to discover Christian faith critically and appreciatively by raising questions, offering interpretations, making comparisons, evaluating, and testing new thought forms, all to encourage growth in understanding. For students to engage with theological investigations guided by a competent professor is not only *not*

harmful but can be positively beneficial, promoting intellectual and frequently spiritual growth. Students are much better prepared to face the world in flux if they have grappled with faith in this way.

With regard to the originally intended adult readers, no one can live in our wired society without being exposed to ideas of every stripe, including religious ones. *Quest's* presentation of glimpses of God arising in different contexts opens windows on the rich mystery of faith. It presents issues that many readers are already thinking and talking about in any case. The Statement seems to think that controversies which in fact exist, such as over the suffering God or the activity of the Spirit in other religions, should not be presented to the thinking public. I am reminded of the delightful anecdote told by Gregory of Nyssa when debate raged in the church over the divinity of Christ: "even the baker," he reported, "does not cease from discussing this, for if you ask the price of bread he will tell you that the Father is greater and the Son subject to him." If a 4<sup>th</sup> century baker can discuss theology of God, 21<sup>st</sup> century educated persons are up to the task, it seems to me. It is *their* faith that is at stake, and if they choose to search for understanding, they may benefit from this book intellectually and spiritually.

In its conclusion the Statement says that *Quest* misleadingly "presents itself as a retrieval of the authentic Christian tradition." Insofar as the book presents glimpses of God emerging out of the religious belief and practice, suffering and study of groups of people struggling to live out their faith today, the retrievals presented are actually signaling something new going forward in the living tradition, "toward the fullness of divine truth" (DV 8). New dimensions of the mystery of faith in the living God revealed in Jesus Christ through the Spirit are coming to light. In its suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter, the book names close to 175 authors whose ideas are represented in its pages. Almost none of them make formulaic metaphysical statements. But all, like Jacob wrestling with the angel, try to bring to expression something of the truth and beauty of God come to heal, redeem, and liberate the questing world of today. Unless certain true but limited language is taken to be the equivalent of the expansive breadth and depth of Catholic teaching - and this may be the heart of the matter - then I respectfully submit that *Quest for the Living God* with its map of frontiers accords with the Catholic tradition and its time-honored tradition of seeking understanding of faith.

Thank you for this invitation to offer my observations on the Committee on Doctrine's Statement. Once again I declare my willingness to continue to dialogue about these important matters.