

CHAPTER TEN

**BREATHING:  
ROMANS 8:1–17**



I am going to mingle scripture with the philosophies of men—not because I am unaware of the danger, but precisely because *I am* aware. Scripture gets mingled with philosophy all the time in places such as Sunday School, priesthood and Relief Society, Seminary, and religion classes at BYU and in our institutes of religion. The problem is not so much the mingling. That is inevitable if we speak reflectively of scripture. The problem is our ignorance of that mingling, our assumption that we are not mingling scripture with philosophy when, in fact, we are. Much of what we say about the gospel is simply late nineteenth-century philosophies of men rather than contemporary philosophies of men: Newtonian science mixed, oddly, with a little Comptean positivism, and a dash of idealism thrown in for good measure.

Here I wish to mingle the first seventeen verses of Romans 8 with philosophical reflection. Set against the backdrop of chapter 7, these verses tell of “life in Christ” or “the indwelling Spirit.” As a response to the problem described in chapter 7, these verses offer a powerful understanding of what Christian obedience means, an understanding too often misunderstood or ignored by Latter-day Saints. From what I hear from fellow Saints—from what I catch myself thinking—we can well afford to be reminded of these verses and their solution to the problem of human frailty. I hope my mingling of philosophy and scripture will help breathe new life into these verses for those who find themselves still in chapter 7, still living the life in which one intends to be a Christian, but has not yet succeeded. I hope that what I say will

help us recover from the suffocation we sometimes think we find in our religious lives.

Romans 7 shows us how, even with the best of intentions, we fail to do good: We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold against my will into slavery to sin: “For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. . . . For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:14, 15, 19). Paul describes an ordinary failure, though a tragic one: the inability to do good steadfastly. We have all had the experience: I do something wrong and hate the fact that I have done it. I resolve to do differently and, for a while, I succeed. Eventually, however, I fail. It often seems as if the more determined my resolve, the less capable I am of doing what I believe to be right. In the face of this problem, we comfort ourselves with a variety of excuses: “One step at a time is good enough; nobody’s perfect”; “As long as I’m trying, that’s what counts.” But such excuses fly in the face of the demand made of us by the gospel, and we know it. We also know that our intentions to obey the law are not good enough to guarantee that we will obey. Among the many results are depression, on the one hand, and hypocrisy, on the other.

If we give up our excuses, the horror of Romans 7 is excruciating. Paul rivals anything Jean-Paul Sartre or Jean Genet has ever written about the excruciating impossibility of moral action. What Paul writes demands that we acknowledge the problem of our inability to do good—or that we wish it away, ignoring what he describes or twisting it and turning it so he says something else. But the phenomenon will not go away. Sooner or later anyone who sincerely tries to do good will be brought to acknowledge what Paul has described here. And the consolations we proffer each other are small consolations because, on the one hand, they deny the humanity of the Savior and, on the other hand, they deny his divine power to save us in this world as well as the next. If we are lucky, that consolation eventually evaporates in the face of our own evil. If we are not lucky, we continue on, chanting “All is well in

Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well” (2 Nephi 28:21), and humming, “if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 28:8).

Our finitude seems to be the problem. The law is infinite. Therefore, it always exceeds my finite will and grasp. I cannot do what is demanded because it is beyond my power to do so. The law requires too much of me. At the heart of Romans, chapter 7 describes the human condition as tragic failure in the classical sense of “tragic,” the failure of our finitude. In it we find a picture of the would-be Christian as a Sophoclean hero, struggling to do good in the face of an absolute inability ultimately to do good: it is not that we do not obey the law, it is that we cannot obey it for any length of time or with any consistency because the law is too much for us. In the face of that inability, we struggle to do good anyway. We are infinitely resigned to our fate, though our resignation is pathetic.

I hope to show that the answer to this problem is a commonplace: the problem described in chapter 7 is a consequence of the fact that the person described in that chapter depends ultimately on only herself. She depends upon herself to do the good, and we all know that we cannot depend on ourselves alone. If we are to do good, we must depend on the Spirit instead.

I am not going to add anything to that commonplace. It is true; what could be added? But in spite of its truth, everything about us says otherwise. It may be a commonplace that we must depend on the Spirit, but that commonplace is contradicted by the very structure that our history has given to ordinary experience: the structure of our culture, the structure of our language and ways of being. These are what I believe almost naturally. At least these things seem so obvious to us that they seem natural. We are sometimes warned against “the philosophies of men,” and I think this supposedly natural belief in what our culture and history has taught us is often what is intended by that phrase. As a consequence, though we pay lip service to the commonplace that we ought to live by the Spirit, I do not

think we often fully believe it, and I think we often contradict it in spite of ourselves.

Philosophers like the seventeenth-century thinker René Descartes have a penchant for clarity and distinctness. Others, like the twentieth-century Austro-British thinker, Ludwig Wittgenstein, want to dissolve philosophical problems. They want to “show the fly the way out of the bottle,”<sup>1</sup> so it will be bothered no more. In spite of that, philosophers are notorious for making the simple difficult. I am more in sympathy with Wittgenstein than Descartes, but my sympathy lies most with Søren Kierkegaard, a nineteenth-century Dane, and one of the most breathtaking philosophers to have lived. In *Johannes Climacus*, Kierkegaard reports that according to Climacus, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard’s most important work, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, difficulty is the point of philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

That is what I propose to do here, to make more difficult the commonplace that we must depend on the Spirit. Such difficulty is not for everyone. Those with the faith of a child certainly do not need it. Neither do those with the more mature faith of a second naivete,<sup>3</sup> those who have passed from childhood through the trials of adolescence, where we confront the reality of evil and our finitude, and into the maturity of genuine faith. But many of us remain religious adolescents. Many of us are beyond the faith of our childhood but still hoping for naivete to return in its mature form. We spiritual adolescents need things to be more difficult. We need philosophy because it may help us on our path toward mature naivete by awakening us from our dogmatic slumber or from the skepticism to which we are so often reduced when we awake from dogmatic slumber and find ourselves in

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1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscomb (London: Blackwell, 1958), ¶309.

2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*, in *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, trans. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1885), 113–73 at 137–38. And we must not forget that Climacus, like many of us, does not understand Christianity, though he writes about its central problem.

3. See the introduction in this volume for more on first and second naivete.

the dark. This essay is for this latter group, for those like myself who are on the way toward second naivete.

Some who know my work will recognize the melody of the song I am about to sing as a beginning because it is one I've sung before. It is a simple song about the history of Western thought, and it goes like this: From the beginning, Western thought has insisted on unity. We have inherited this emphasis on unity from the early Greeks, who might have offered this argument: Whatever is ultimate must be unitary. Why? Well, suppose it is not. Suppose there are two ultimate things. If there are, how are they related to each other such that they are the ultimate source of everything else? If there is nothing that brings them together, then there is no world, and we know there is a world. So there must be something that brings them together, something common to each. But if there is something common to each, then that thing, whatever it is, produces the one world from the two things that we assumed were ultimate. In that case, it seems reasonable to say that whatever uses the two things to make our world is more metaphysically fundamental, more ultimate, than the two things. In other words, if we suppose there are two ultimate things, we come to the conclusion that there is really only one.

Reasoning this way, everything must finally work out to one thing, not two. There is only one reality; there can be only one ultimate explanation for any event or thing. That assumption is at the heart of Western intellectual history. It has made science possible. We have always sought for some unified and enclosed system that would give the systematic and coherent law of reality without reference to anything outside it. As important as this assumption has been for the development of science, it has been less salubrious for our understanding of moral action.

The supposition of one ultimate means that there can be only one origin for good. Either that one origin is me or it is something outside of me. In other words, either I am the unified and enclosed system that makes good possible, or something outside of me is. If I am the

origin, fine (though we have the problem described in Romans 7, the problem of my finitude and the infinity of the law). If it is something outside of me, then either I encompass it or it encompasses me, since we have to have closure in order to have unity. Unless I can encompass the grounds for moral behavior, taking control over them, unless they can become part of me, it seems they can never be any more than an authority before which I must bow in acquiescence, which is hardly a description of moral action. Most of us find it hard to imagine that moral action is possible from any other origin than the ego, the “I think.” Following the vocabulary of Emmanuel Levinas,<sup>4</sup> I will call this recourse to the individual as the source of moral behavior, autonomy, self-rule.

In autonomy, the individual must depend on himself to do the truly good. I believe Bertrand Russell described the problem of doing good in something like this way: “You can choose what you desire, but you cannot choose your desires.” In other words, to most of us it is clear that we can do what we desire to do. But what about what we do not desire to do? If I want to do what is right, I can, but suppose I do not want to do the good thing? How could I choose to do it? What sense would it make for someone to say to me, “But you *should* want to do it”? How can I choose to want something? It appears that either I want it or I do not. Russell’s problem is a genuine conundrum for any discussion of moral behavior, but Paul goes Russell one better: even if you do desire to do something, you cannot be assured that you will, especially if what you desire is to do good. It is not just that sometimes we want the wrong thing and, so, choose what is wrong. We sometimes do the bad thing in spite of ourselves. Sometimes we desire to do the right thing yet do the wrong thing.<sup>5</sup>

4. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

5. Some try to avoid this by arguing that we must have wanted the wrong thing more than the right thing if that is what we chose. But that goes directly against our experience of our behavior.

As Western thought is often understood, the only alternative to the self-assertion of enclosure and autonomy is suicide or genocide, though usually intellectual rather than physical suicide or genocide. This alternative agrees that unity and closure are necessary, but it sees the shortcomings and inability of the individual. Thus, it says that the unitary, closed origin of good is outside of me and that I must become part of it, if I am to do good. Rather than encompassing what is outside of my autonomous self, taking control of it, I must be encompassed by it. I must give up my individuality and freedom, my autonomy, to the control of a closed totality that is bigger than I am. I must disappear into this larger autonomy. Some ideas of God require this kind of self-annihilation. This has also been the Marxist alternative. This way of seeing things comes in a variety of guises. Without taking the time to explain why, let me say simply that I believe this alternative to autonomy fails even more fully than the historically more common individualistic alternative. It fails primarily because, though it is not individualistic, this alternative continues to assert the primacy of autonomy: divine, social, historical, or state power, but totality, enclosure, system, and power anyway. Autonomy is the rule, whether it is individual autonomy or the autonomy of history, the State, or a false god.

The individual is almost always assumed to be the ontological and ethical origin of the good. It may be that an origin outside the individual is posited. But the individual can do good only because he includes that origin within himself. On this view, an act is only an ethical act if it is the internalized free choice of an individual. Many of the ways we think about ethics assume the primacy of the individual and of freedom. We say, for example, that unless the command I obey is mine, I cannot be ethical. We struggle to teach our children that they must learn to choose for themselves, that their ethical behavior must come from within. In our academic discussions of ethics, the broadly appealing ethics of Kant are an excellent example of our understanding of the relation of the good to the individual.

For most of us, most of the time, recourse to the individual seems the only possibility. With the fool, Polonius, we tell ourselves, “To thine own self be true.”<sup>6</sup> However, Romans 7 is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the desire to bring about the good by grasping it, willing it, mastering it—by interiorizing it and then acting from that interiority freely. Reliance on oneself seems unavoidable, but reliance on oneself ends in Sophoclean tragedy, at best. As Proverbs says, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:25). Is there a way of maintaining individuality and having something other than myself as an adequate source of the ability to do good without committing a kind of suicide, without giving up all semblance of individuality? Are my only choices the tragedy of being a free individual but unable, ultimately, to do good or, in contrast, being subject to some force exterior to me and, so, able to do good, but no longer an individual in any meaningful sense? Paul’s answer is yes. But his answer does not mean what we think it does. To make sense of his answer we must think quite differently than we are accustomed to thinking. The Christian alternative cannot easily be found within the structure of Western thought, though it can be found there if one goes looking.

A beginning of this Christian rethinking of weakness of the will is to be found in asking, “What if the law is not the kind of thing ever to be willed or grasped? What if doing good is neither one of my powers nor a power to which I must accede because it is not a power of any kind? What if willing and grasping are themselves the problem because they convert doing good into a question of control?” Though Romans 7 shows us that autonomy—free self-rule—cannot bring about the good, and it shows us the tragedy of autonomy, it does not show us that there is no good or that we cannot do it—unless we also assume, as we often do and as we think we must, that autonomy is the only grounds for the possibility of the good.

Paul proposes that, in spite of what logically seems to be the case at first glance, there is an alternative assumption. Romans 8 comes as

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6. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3.

an answer to the Sophoclean problem by showing another kind of law and another kind of obedience: We need not trust in our own hearts, nor must we be swallowed up in something beyond ourselves. If Romans 7 shows us the problem of autonomy, then Romans 8 shows us heteronomy, obedience to a law that is not mine to grasp, appropriate, and master because it is the law of the Other. It shows us obedience to a law with which I do not have to struggle and which I do not have to make mine. In fact, the law of Romans 8 cannot be made mine or anyone's, even by an act of will, so there can be no question of struggle with it. Neither is it a matter of ceasing to exist in the face of the new law by becoming one with something outside of myself. The law of Romans 8—if, indeed, it continues to make sense to call law what calls for the Christian's obedience—is outside the Parmenidean logic of unity. Rather than the dominance and necessity of ultimate unity, we will see Paul propose another way of thinking about the world and the possibility of good: the moral law is always the rule of another, never self-rule, but it is not subjugation to or absorption into another. Romans 8 shows us life in Christ Jesus, a life in which we remain individual while we are obligated but not subjected to the Other Person and other persons. In chapter 8 we will see life in the Spirit.

### **Verses One and Two**

<sup>1</sup>This means there is now no condemnation for those whose being is in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed me from the law of sin and death.

Paul ends chapter 7 jubilantly: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So, by myself I serve the law of God only in my thoughts, while with the flesh I serve the law of sin” (Romans 7:25). His jubilation comes before his summation of the problem, but that summation is followed by verse 1 of chapter 8.<sup>7</sup> Paul's jubilation, joy

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7. The chapter division, created more than a thousand years after Paul wrote his letter, is unfortunate because it divides the single thought that extends across Romans

in the face of the tragedy he has just described, is possible because those who have their existence, not in themselves, but in the Other—in the Divine Other—those whose life is not merely a life of autonomy, do not find themselves judged and separated from the Good. They are not doomed, for their being is neither in-itself nor for-itself. It is being-in-and-for-another, but not an other that absorbs and digests everything but itself. Rather than the closed, solid, impenetrable Parmenidean being presumed in the history of Western philosophy, for those in Christ, being is founded in what exceeds them and calls them. The choices that seem so inevitable from within autonomy fade away because we are not autonomous—and neither, as we will see, are we subjugated.

Life in the Other, heteronomous law, frees us from the alienation of simple autonomy, an alienation from God and even from ourselves, because heteronomous life is incompatible with merely autonomous life. If we live heteronomously, our lives are fuller because we are not confined to the boundaries of our selves. Our lives are always a matter of excess and extravagance, the excess and extravagance of what is other than us, of what cannot be subsumed or systematized in autonomy. We can and must create order. However, order and the Greek *logos* (rather than Christian one) are not fundamental. Instead, order and rationality come from the abundance of life as a loving response to it. Life creates order and rationality; they do not make life what it is. Order and rationality are a response to the fact that not everything is contained within the ego, to the fact that something challenges the I's claim to autonomy, namely the Other. They are the human response to an ethical demand, the demand that we explain ourselves, that we accommodate our existence to the existence of others.<sup>8</sup> According to a common reading, as a history of autonomy, Western philosophy has held its breath for 2,500 years.<sup>9</sup> Its spirit has been its own (autonomy)

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7:25 and Romans 8:1 into two pieces, causing us to miss the fact that they are part of the same thought.

8. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 201.

9. There are, of course, better readings of that history.

and not the Holy Spirit (heteronomy). Enclosed within itself, Western philosophy has breathed nothing but itself. In fact, it has not even desired to breath something other than itself. Many of our metaphors for knowledge are metaphors of vision: “I see what you mean.” As those metaphors illustrate, Western philosophy has thought seeing to be so important that it has, more often than not, not even thought about breathing. Even Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, though a frank admission of the need for Spirit and breath in thought, ends up an exercise in holding one’s breath—suffocation—because it never opens itself to anything exterior. In spite of itself, like the usual reading of the previous history of philosophy, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is an account of breathing in an ultimately closed space, the space of the totality of knowledge, the Absolute.

Christianity proposes something else. It proposes that, like Adam, the dust of our autonomous, dead flesh cannot make itself live, but it can be brought to life if we receive the breath of God. Having the Spirit, breathing, is always a matter of exteriority and exposure; to breathe is necessarily to allow what is exterior to come in. It is to expose the interior of my lungs, the very center of my interiority, to the exterior. In place of the suffocation and appropriation found in the autonomous self, Christianity reveals exposure to the Other through the Spirit, through life-giving breath. Life in another, namely Christ, frees us from death and suffocation, for that life gives us our breath. The solution to the problem we have seen—either self-enclosed, tragically heroic morality or self-annihilation in the Absolute—is found in the Spirit, in bringing the Other into our autonomous, enclosed world and fracturing our autonomy by that entry. The Spirit, the breath of God, is not another enclosure in which our enclosure is subsumed. The Spirit is not another all-encompassing law to which I must submit. If it were, it would be only another death. The alternative to the death found in self-rule would be only the death of annihilation in the Other. Instead of being a modification of the enclosed self or an enclosure into which the self must enter, the law of the Spirit is a breach in

enclosure, the destruction of autonomy, the destruction of the law of power. Breathing is not a matter of bringing everything into ourselves. Neither is it a matter of giving ourselves over so completely to what is exterior to us that we lose our identity. I cannot breathe if I do not have a body into which the Spirit can enter, a body separate from the Spirit; I must remain an individual if I am to receive the Spirit. But breathing breaks the solidity of the wall supposed between myself and my exterior. I cannot breathe if enclosure is the rule. Breathing the breath of life, “having the Spirit,” requires the exposure of my interiority to the exterior.

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of salvation in the Spirit. Presumably, Nicodemus was an obedient man. Many presume that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, and whether he was or not, it is clear that he was an upstanding and exemplary member of his community, one of the rulers (see John 3:1). But in spite of his self-discipline and uprightness in the law, Jesus told him he must be transformed, reborn, and Nicodemus could not understand how that could be. We can imagine him asking, “What remains for me to do? I am not yet perfect, but I try very hard to do all that the law requires.” In answer Jesus said:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.  
(John 3:6–8)

By itself, the flesh is not the living, human body; it is the autonomous body, the unbreathing, uninspired body. Merely autonomous life is suffocation. Rebirth requires breath and wind. Without that, rebirth would be stillbirth. Only the end of autonomy, the entry into the individual by the Other, can bring birth about.

The entry of the Spirit, the breach in autonomy by the breath of God, is life, deliverance from mere flesh by the revivification of that

flesh. But the Spirit that revivifies is not to be mastered, and it is not something to be mastered by. The law of the Spirit gives life, but it cannot be reduced to a set of rules or written down in an agenda. Rebirth is not a goal to be planned for and attained. One cannot master the wind, the breath. But neither is one mastered by it; the Spirit is not a ruler, at least not of the kind to which we are accustomed. Life is not a matter of mastery, either of self or by another. Life, heteronomous life, the only real life, is a matter of openness and exposure to the Other. It is a matter of breathing. It is a matter of accepting the breath of life.

To open oneself to the breath of life is to be freed from death. To breathe is no longer to suffocate. Exposure to the Other brings freedom from alienation and death, though that freedom is threatening because it is exposure, because I must trust in someone other than myself and because it is always possible, at least in principle, that the Other to whom I am exposed can kill me. Those who would live must give up holding their breath, breathing only their own flesh. They must breathe the breath of another, the breath of Christ Jesus.

### **Verses Three and Four**

<sup>3</sup>What the law was powerless to do, because of the weakness of flesh, God did, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh for a sin offering, thereby condemning us in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>so that the just demands of the law might be satisfied in us, who conduct ourselves not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Autonomous life, mere dead—because unbreathing, uninspired—flesh, is weak. Without the breath of life, it is powerless. Perhaps that is why autonomy makes such an issue of power. Romans 7 shows that autonomy is unable to do what it desires to do, namely bring about the good. But the Father, by sending his Son among us, was able to reveal the barrenness of mere autonomy and, thus, to condemn it so that we can live justly.

For the Father, too, the law is a matter of heteronomy. He is not a merely autonomous being who demands that we submit our autonomy to his. The law of God is heteronomous through and through, not the submission of one autonomy to another. The law that the Father offers does not substitute his autonomy for ours. He does not condemn us by making a demand of us with which we must struggle or by issuing a decree to which we must submit. Rather, we are condemned by the very fact that in response to our autonomous demand for freedom (which turns out to be only alienation), he freely offers himself and his Son. Without recourse to any “need” for freedom, he exposes himself and his Son to us and our injustice. Indeed, his exposure of himself is proof that he is not the autonomous being pictured by the tradition, for an autonomous being cannot expose himself. In principle, cannot. In exposing himself and his Son, the Father reveals the alienation inherent in our autonomy and freedom. His free gift reveals the paucity of our freedom, a freedom of needs and demands. In turn, that revelation of freedom makes another freedom—freedom in Christ—possible, a freedom of grace and love.

God’s offer of the Son, therefore, is anything but the offer of a scapegoat. He does not offer his Son in response to some demand for vengeance and retribution, whether that demand is a particular demand or a metaphysical one. To do so would be to authorize such demands. To do so would be to put an end to the possibility of justice. It would be to give power to injustice by acknowledging it and acquiescing to it. Instead, the Father puts an end to any such demand by offering his Son and himself in response to our injustice. He does not put an end to our injustice; he offers even the Divine to us in our injustice. There is no hint of autonomy, self-sufficiency, or misconceived freedom in the offer. They are beside the point.

We popularly speak of the atonement as a matter of fulfilling the demands of some impartial and even hateful metaphysical principle of justice. The contemporary thinker René Girard has argued convincingly that such a conception is pagan, not Christian, and that the

message of Christianity is not that there was an ultimate scapegoat, but that scapegoating is avoidable and must be avoided.<sup>10</sup> Christ has called both himself and the Holy Spirit, “the Paraclete”—not just the Comforter, though that translation is meaningful and important, but the one who stands beside another, the advocate, the defense attorney (see John 14:16; see also 1 John 2:1). Jesus offers himself in our defense—against our autonomous selves rather than against some metaphysical principle of justice to which he must bow. He offers himself so that we will be able to meet the demands that justice makes of us. Heteronomous law is the life of Christ.

The offering Christ makes is in the incarnation. By being embodied, the Son offers us his breath that we may breathe. Unembodied, God would remain merely autonomous, either enclosed within himself and, therefore, never able to obligate us by offering himself to us, or so open and amorphous as to be meaningless. A breath without a body is not even a breath. God’s offering is the body and the blood of his Son; it is his breath, his life.

Paul says that the incarnation presents the Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, suggesting to some that his life among us was only an appearance. Some gnostics of the first- and second-century church believed as much, and it was against this denial of the incarnation of Christ in a body like our own that the early church fathers fought tenaciously.<sup>11</sup> Today, if we speak of Christ as half human and half Divine rather than fully human and, at the same time, fully Divine, I think we make a gnostic suggestion. But the gnostic assumption is a misreading. Christ did appear among us in the flesh, but his flesh was not sinful, autonomous flesh, though it may have seemed to be so. We mistake individuality and embodiment for autonomy, thinking they

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10. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

11. See Michel Henry, *L’Incarnation, Une phénoménologie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), especially pp. 14–19, for a good synopsis of the relevant issues. Though we think of the Council of Nicea as deciding the nature of the Godhead, its most important issue was the refutation of the gnostic idea that the Son was not embodied.

are necessarily identical. He was, indeed, an embodied individual, but he did not live autonomously, and by not doing so, he both showed us the possibility of living justly and condemned us for not doing so. By living as an individual human, Christ demonstrated that alienation is not essential to individuality, and he showed that the freedom of arbitrariness and individuality, as well as the search for mastery and domination—even of the self—is beside the point.

Justice is possible for and by those who breathe. It is a matter of exhalation as well as inhalation, of expiration as well as inspiration. But justice is not a matter of either mastery or submission. It is a matter of meeting our obligations, obligations to the Other incurred because of his sacrifice. Justice is not a matter of disciplining ourselves to follow a rule imposed on us, but of being infused with the offering of Christ. It is a matter of breathing in the breath which he expires and returning that breath to another. It is a matter of being, ourselves, a paraclete rather than a judge. It is a matter of finding our being, not in ourselves, but in others.

If we live autonomously, we cannot meet the just demands of the law, because we cannot breathe. Bounded flesh cannot reach beyond itself, cannot get outside itself, so it cannot do justice, no matter how hard it tries. But the living law is contrary to the dead and breathless freedom demanded in autonomy and required in response to the law of autonomy. Because the autonomous individual reacts allergically to anything exterior to himself, assuming that it demands his subjugation, he insists on the freedom of autonomy (and, often, in subjugating what is other than himself). As a result, he takes his obligation to the Son to be nothing more than a threat: “Do what I say, or die.” Even if the autonomous person desires to do otherwise, once the law is a threat, he cannot obey it with any consistency. Sooner or later, he will assert his own existence in the face of that threat. Sooner or later he will act unjustly. But the person needs no self-defense, for the law he perceives as a threat is really the manifestation of the Paraclete. It is

really what breaks the boundary of his flesh so that the breath of life may enter, a breath that makes justice possible.

Thus, the irony is that the Son's demand is not the demand of another autonomy threatening a person's autonomy. It is odd even to call it a demand, since, though the person feels obligated, the Son does not demand. He is Other than the person, and that otherness is a threat. But the threat is only a threat to the person's continued, dead existence. It is a threat only to a suffocating life that breathes only flesh and never Spirit. Rather than standing before a person making a demand for the sake of his own autonomy, the Son stands beside the person and beside any to whom the person would be unjust, always already breathing the breath of life into them, always already disrupting the person's claim to autonomy and opening the possibility of justice. The disruption of autonomy by heteronomy does not negate or overcome autonomy's freedom. Freedom in the sense we usually understand that term simply ceases to be an issue.

Experience (with the emphasis on the *ex*), not freedom, is the issue in heteronomy. As the twentieth-century German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer argues, experience is always of the individual, never the universal,<sup>12</sup> so it cannot be reduced to autonomy, to some systematic, complete, and in-itself whole. As he also argues, experience is essentially negative: "Every experience worthy of the name crosses out our expectation."<sup>13</sup> We are never left the same after an experience. Experience is always of what is other than the sameness we expect.

When Odysseus leaves Ithaca to travel in the world, one can argue that he seeks knowledge, not experience. He wishes to see much and to hear some, but he returns to the same place from which he left, essentially unchanged. For all of his sightseeing, he remains the same. Though he appears to have ventured into what is exterior to him, he

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12. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960, 1975), 334; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1975, 2004), 346.

13. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 338; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 350, trans. Weinsheimer and Marshall.

has not really done so. He has had no *experience*. If I may coin a word, we might say he has had only *inperience*. He has lived freely. He has seen and done much. But he has encompassed what he has encountered, brought it into himself, to return home with it as booty. He now owns more; he has appropriated events and places far from Ithaca, but he is himself the same. As the homecoming scene of the *Odyssey* emphasizes, the Odysseus who returns to Ithaca is exactly the same individual as the one who left. Odysseus needs no paraclete, for he can defend himself; what he does comes from within himself and, in the long run, is what he chooses to do; what he encounters does not change him, but he takes possession of it. Odysseus is the model of an autonomous individual.

Abraham is different.<sup>14</sup> As Abram he leaves his country, his kin, and his father's house, never to return. One might presume he is alienated, but his separation from country, kin, and house are to bring about justice: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Abram is separated, but not alienated. The very point of his separation is ethical life, justice.

Later Abram's autonomy is interrupted once again by the command to be circumcised and his change of name to Abraham: he does not return; his identity does not remain the same. In circumcision the organ of regeneration is interrupted and exposed as a sign of Abraham's exposure and obligation to God, an obligation to be fecund, an obligation that is never merely individual and that cannot be mastered or, as Abraham discovers, planned. The question of Abraham's freedom—a question that cannot be avoided from within autonomy—never comes up. He is the one with whom God has covenanted for the blessing of the world. He is, therefore, obliged, but not subjugated. In fact, in being obliged to God and the entire world, Abraham is a ruler, not a subject (see Genesis 17:6–8). Abraham stands for the world as a

14. I owe this comparison of Odysseus and Abraham to a suggestion made by Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 271.

lawyer stands for his client; he becomes its paraclete. By being obliged to God, he becomes a defender and a blessing, and in that he rules.

The point of the Divine sacrifice is the satisfaction of justice. The law demands that we be just, but, of ourselves, we are unable to do so because we are unable to escape ourselves. Tragic heroism is the only possibility. But when the breath of life, the Spirit, is breathed into us in covenant, then we are alive and able to be just. We escape our lives, but not through ourselves. The interruption of our autonomy by the Other comes in order to bring about justice, perhaps justice for ourselves, though it is difficult to imagine how one who is autonomous can demand justice for herself, and one who lives heteronomously would have no need to make such a demand. Certainly the interruption of our autonomy comes in order to bring the blessing of justice for all the world. It comes to make possible ethical life, life *with* one another rather than lives of domination and cruelty.

### Verses Five through Eight

<sup>5</sup>Those who have their being towards the flesh aspire to the things of the flesh; those who have their being towards the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>For, to aspire to the flesh is death, but aspiration to the Spirit is life and peace, <sup>7</sup>because an aspiration to the flesh is hatred of God, not being subject to God's law, or even having the power to be subject to him; <sup>8</sup>those who are in the flesh are powerless to please God.

If autonomous being is fundamental, if we are, like Parmenides' "Entity"—enclosed and enclosing solid bodies, without interstices and unbreached by the influx of breath—then we can aspire to nothing not already contained in those bodies of solid flesh. We can breathe only ourselves, and we must quickly suffocate. In contrast, if our being is predicated on what is exterior to us, on what is prior to that being, if our flesh is infused with the breath of life, then we can aspire to life. We become living bodies.

Aspiration toward only ourselves is expiration, not aspiration. To breathe only flesh is to be dead, and to be dead is to be in opposition to life and the giver of life. In contrast, to aspire toward the Other, to aspire to inspiration, is to aspire to life and peace. This is because death—autonomy—is alienation from God. Autonomy is not only not to be under the law of God, it is to be unable to be under that law because the very thing that constitutes the law, namely heteronomy and the breath of life that it brings, is absent.

When we are autonomous, we see the question of ethics as a question of power: do we have the power to do good? But to reduce the question of the good to a question of power is to reduce ethics to agonistics. War is the outcome of autonomy, and this is true whether we speak of the autonomy of the self or the autonomy of some overarching entity to which we are subject. If I am complete in myself, then anything exterior to me is a threat. Anything other than myself must be subdued or I must give in to it, but in either case, the only possible attitude is one of battle and struggle, the struggle to the death that Hegel portrays in the fourth chapter of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, the autonomous self can have no relation to the law but one of struggle, and most of us—indeed, all—are all too familiar with that struggle.

In such a situation, peace is impossible, even if it were possible finally to win the struggle with the law. For peace is not simply the cessation of war. To have won the war, finally to have disciplined the self or to have submitted to the will of another, to have destroyed the enemy or to have been destroyed, is not to have found peace. Peace and war are not opposites; they are incommensurables. Since autonomy is an insistence on the enclosed self and the enclosure of everything in the self, it is the sin of Cain, murder for gain. It is the destruction of the

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15. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Hegel, too, sees that the only way out of the struggle is to give it up. Significantly, he argues that servitude rather than mastery will allow us to have the selfhood we sought in mastery. Nevertheless, in his argument “Spirit” never gets outside itself. It is condemned never to breathe.

otherness of what is not the same (what is not enclosed within the autonomous entity) for the benefit of the autonomous entity. Autonomy is not peace, even when successful, for finally to have murdered everyone who opposes me is not to have brought peace.

In contrast, peace is justice for and dedication to the Other. As a consequence, those who are in the flesh and have no breath are powerless to be in a positive relation to God, for that relation requires living in peace, not satisfying his whims. Though those whose being is in the flesh would rid themselves of it if they could, murder is in their hearts, for the only being that ultimately matters is their own. But to please God is to be just, as he is just. It is to be accommodated to his character, the character of the Paraclete, not the murderer.

### **Verse Nine**

<sup>9</sup>You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit—if the Spirit of God dwells in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person is not his.

The possibility of heteronomous life, obedience to the law, righteousness, is not a pie-in-the-sky possibility. It is not something we must wait for the eternities to inherit. Those whose autonomy has been disrupted by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, by the offering without demand, now find themselves under the law of heteronomy, open to the Other, breathing and, therefore, capable of justice—as long as they remain exposed to the Other, as long as they allow their lungs to turn outward to the breath of God. The breath of the autonomous is only their own; they breathe nothing more than their own flesh and, therefore, they die. But those who live heteronomously, those who have been interrupted by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the influx of the Spirit—who have been converted—are interpenetrated by the breath of the Other. The movement of their diaphragm is not an autonomous

act.<sup>16</sup> It is the individual's response to another, to *the Other*. Breathing happens between the inner and the outer, not merely as a matter of one or the other.

### Verses Ten and Eleven

<sup>10</sup>If, then, Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of justice. <sup>11</sup>If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from death dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from death will make your mortal bodies alive by his Spirit which dwells in you.

If we have received the breath of God through Jesus Christ, we have been resurrected, here and now. We await a second, final resurrection to immortal bodies, but the most important resurrection, spiritual resurrection, has already occurred. It has brought our bodies to life in this life so that we may be just.

If God has breathed into us through his Son, Jesus Christ, then we become like Christ, the new Adam, the Unique One.<sup>17</sup> Heteronomy makes our individuality possible, for autonomous individuality is nihilism, death. Only if there is another can individuality make sense. The mortal resurrection brought about by conversion is a resurrection to life and individuality as well as community; it is a destruction of death and autonomy and a foreshadowing of the resurrection that is to come.

### Verses Twelve and Thirteen

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, fellow saints, we have an obligation—but not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh; <sup>13</sup>for if you live

16. Note that *phronēsis* (“prudence” or “good judgment”) is from *phrēn* (“diaphragm”). See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps. *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1843; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), s.v. φρήν.

17. John Bowker translates Genesis 3:22 as “He [Adam] is become like the unique One among us.” John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 117–18.

according to the flesh, you are condemned to die, but if you kill the deeds of the body by the Spirit, you will live.

Mortal resurrection creates an obligation in us, the obligation to justice. But that is not an obligation to ourselves and our autonomy, since our autonomy is dead. Neither is it an obligation to some exterior autonomy. We are obliged by our very being to be just to those who stand before us. We are obliged to expose ourselves to their needs and to work to satisfy those needs. The Other gives me my breath, the breath upon which I draw for my life, so it is the breath which I must exhale. To have received the Spirit of God is to be obligated, to give as the Spirit gave to a brother or sister, to one who also needs the breath of life.

Autonomy creates no real obligation; ultimately obligation to self makes no real sense. As a result, those for whom life is a matter of body but not of breathing are always at the moment of death. Ironically, though they fear death more than anything and do everything to prevent it, they are always dying and, so, unable to live or to give life. Sophoclean heroism, recognition of the imminence of death and bravery in the face of it, is the only alternative for the constantly dying. But the autonomy of the body is destroyed by inspiration; the breath of the Other kills death and resurrects us; those who breathe in the breath of life live and give life.

#### **Verse Fourteen**

<sup>14</sup>All who are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God.

The answer to the contradiction between our finitude and the infinity of the law is found in the Spirit. But how can one be led by a breath? There is nothing to see; how can we follow? Philosophy has constantly demanded and continues to demand vision: we must see the truth, we must behold it. But the gaze is the work of autonomy. Vision converts the exterior into the interior. It takes a position of superiority to what is seen and masters it. The eye is an extension of

the hand; but the breath is an infusion through the nose and mouth. If we are autonomous, we cannot be led by a breath, for there is nothing to see, so we must constantly fail as we try to do good. Our own light does not reach far enough for us to see, and the Other gives not light, but breath. In the absence of light, what can we do? We can be led by that breath if we inhale.

The command of the Other, a command to justice, is a breath we can receive, as does the Son, and if we do, then we are also sons of God: we do the same thing that he does. (The point is not about the gender of God's offspring, but their imitation of the Son.) To be Christlike is to hear and to breathe. It is to respond by offering oneself to justice, not merely to submit.

### **Verse Fifteen**

<sup>15</sup>You did not receive a spirit of slavery that caused you to fear again; instead you received a spirit of adoption, by which we cry out, "Abba! Father."

The breath of life does not subjugate us. We are not simply subsumed into the will of God and his supposedly more primordial autonomy. There is nothing to fear because, having opened ourselves to the breath of God, we are not protecting our autonomy. Our resurrection in and through Christ makes us sons—children—of God. The Father breathes into our dead, Adamic bodies and makes us his children. Though we were outside of the divine family ties in alienating autonomy, we are, once again, part of a family and not merely on our own. We obey because we are obliged to obey by our openness to the Other in an eternal family, not because we are subjected but because we love. Our obedience is a matter of our parentage and our filiation.

### **Verses Sixteen and Seventeen**

<sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. <sup>17</sup>But if we are children, then we are heirs:

heirs of God, heirs with Christ—provided that we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.

The Spirit breathes into us the knowledge that we are part of a divine family, a group of at least three that immediately spreads out to infinity. Our inhalation of the breath of life is the knowledge that we live with others in fraternity and sorority.

If we continue to breathe, we become as the Son of God; we become the children of God. With Christ, we inherit what the Father has to give: “And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:38). We are accustomed to the promise of the glory we are to inherit: power, authority, honor. In noticing these, however, we often overlook the rest of that inheritance. We often forget that to inherit the glory of God is also to inherit suffering. Only the dead, the absolutely dead, do not suffer. Those who live and breathe must suffer with Christ—be exposed with Christ—or deny him.

The suffering of Christ is unjust suffering. It is not deserved or even explicable. Christ’s suffering is the concomitant obverse of the fact that he has poured himself out into the lives and bodies of others in order to be just and to bring justice about (see Philippians 2:7). His mercy is his justice, a justice that mercifully obligates us to justice by exposing itself to injustice. By his mercy and justice, he disrupts the agony of our autonomy. He calls us to justice by suffering unjustly.

We find autonomy, life in the Absolute, appealing because it seems to hide us from exposure and suffering. But the avoidance of suffering to be found in autonomy is unavoidably agonistic because it is unavoidably egoistic. It is agony. Avoiding suffering brings us the agony described in Romans 7, and it inflicts agony on those who are other than ourselves. When we choose to avoid suffering, we choose to suffer death and agony, and we choose to inflict injustice. If we breathe in the breath of life, we cannot forget that God himself suffered and continues to suffer. His suffering—his allowing rather than determining—is his glory.

Jesus's suffering injustice for justice is his glory, but Moses 1:5 and 1:39 indicate that his work is also his glory. The autonomous individual conceives of work as that which is to be completed, as something to be finished and then encompassed or left behind. The autonomous individual conceives of her existence as a work to be accomplished and is frustrated that, given her finitude, its only completion is death. She cannot perfect herself, and so she assumes that perfection is impossible—"at least in this life," as they say. For the autonomous individual, the point is to get to the point where one needs no more to work, where everything that needs to be done has been done. In other words, though she would never describe it in these terms, the autonomous individual desires death.

Although already dead—because unbreathing—the autonomous individual seeks death by seeking to bring an end to time. He seeks to be contemporaneous with himself and his works. Since he is autonomous, undisturbed by the Other, he would give his works to no one but himself. He would have everything fit into one spherical and systematic ball of being, of which he is the identity. The living God, however, not only does not renounce work, he affirms it. There is no completion of the work of God, just as and for the same reason that there is no end to his glory. For God, something always remains to be done. He has never finished exhaling. He can never have been exposed to us and the possibility of our injustice enough. Rather than living in the already over, God lives in the "not yet," where there is still time, where it is still possible to act. Only in the not yet does justice remain a possibility, and only in the not yet does our obligation to bring about justice make sense. Unlike the autonomous, for the heteronomous, work is a matter of grace, the gift to the Other, the breath of life.

God's mercy is his justice. His work is his glory. His glory is his suffering. His suffering is his grace. His grace is his Spirit.