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On the Goodness of the God Portrayed in the Old Testament

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On The Goodness Of The God Portrayed in the Old Testament

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

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Introduction: Questioning the Integrity of My Belief

A person's time at college is a unique opportunity to become engaged with the worldviews of others. At no point during college is this engagement as intense as during the first semester of one's freshman year. It was during my first semester here at Regis that I was asked a question by one of my friends, Dexter Schiller. He asked me how I could be a Christian who believes in a loving God when there is so much violence in the Old Testament. I asked him to show me a particular passage, and he picked this selection from the second book of Kings Chapter 2 verses 23 to 25:

From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. "Get out of here, baldy!" they said. "Get out of here, baldy!" He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria.

I can't really remember how I addressed his concerns, but I know that I relied on a quick Google search in order to find some response.

While I may have answered his objection for the moment, I did not answer the question to my own satisfaction. Ever since that discussion with him, I have continually been

confronted with passages from the Old Testament which I have struggled to synthesize with my own Catholic faith. From this religious angst was born my thesis.

In this thesis I explore the question of whether or not a loving God is compatible with God as revealed in the Old Testament. I have chosen to frame this question along the lines of whether the God revealed in the Old Testament is compatible with the God known through reason. I chose this standard of reason for two reasons: one, because reason is a standard that can be used by all people, religious or non-religious, and two, because I believe that ultimately love is rooted in reason and therefore a loving God must ultimately be a rational God. I want to briefly explore these two reasons in a little more depth.

Why does it matter to me that reason is acceptable to both religious and non-religious people? This is important to me because of the original conversation with Dexter. Dexter is not a practicing Christian, so if I tried to explain the Old Testament by appealing to religious faith such an appeal would not be very convincing. Also, as I was beginning to explore this thesis, I discovered that the most popular searches for God and the Old Testament are: is God of the Old Testament evil, is God of the Old Testament a merciless monster, is God of the Old Testament a moral monster, and is God of the Old Testament different from the God of the New Testament. In addition to the Dexters in my life, I also want to address my fellow contemporaries who are googling such things. In my paper I will use these contemporary googlers as the main audience that to whom I am writing.

Also, why does it matter to me that a loving God is rational? For me, this is rooted in the belief that there is a fundamental harmony in all of the goodness in the world, and that through reason the fundamental unity of all good things can be discerned. With this belief in

the fundamental rational unity of all goodness, it is important for me to explore whether or not the God of the Old Testament is in accord with this rationally unified goodness.

I will explore this question by examining how three major Christian thinkers, Augustine, Calvin, and Aquinas, have tackled this question in the past. From there, I will explore whether or not such a rational inquiry is compatible with faith as portrayed in the Old Testament. Finally, from the position that such a rational inquiry is harmonious with Old Testament faith, I will sketch several brief principles about God which can serve as a foundation for a rational hermeneutic of God's portrayal in the Old Testament.

Augustine on the Old Testament

One of the first attempts within the Christian tradition to synthesize the image of God in Old Testament with the notion of a just and loving God can be found in Augustine of Hippo's work *Contra Faustum* (In English, *Answers to Faustus a Manichean*). In this work Augustine argues against some of the propositions of the Manichean heretic Faustus, who argued, among other things, that there was a difference between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. Augustine, in his response to Faustus, argues for the fundamental unity of the two Testaments. Augustine's defense relies on two main arguments: that the sins of many of the figures of the Old Testament are not actually sins and that what God did in the Old Testament was appropriate because of the circumstances of those times. Both of these arguments will be further examined in order to evaluate their relative merits as hermeneutical principles for interpreting the Old Testament. (The following citations are from *Contra Faustum* unless otherwise indicated.)

On the Sinfulness of the Patriarchs and Prophets

Augustine argues that many of the apparent sins of figures in the Old Testament are not actually sins. This argument can first be found in book twenty two of *Contra Faustum* in response to Faustus' charge that Abraham slept with Hagar because he did not trust in the

promises of God (300). Augustine's response to Faustus will serve as an example of the type of defense he makes of the moral character of the Patriarchs and Prophets.

Augustine contends that a sin is, "... a deed, word, or desire, contrary to the eternal law," (317) which is, "... the divine reason or the will of God," (317). His definition of sin is fairly conventional, but it is his language about what constitutes the eternal law that requires further investigation. His definition of eternal law is complicated for two reasons: he does not define the phrase divine reason and because of his use of the conjunction "or." What does Augustine mean by divine reason and what is meant, if anything, by saying the reason of God *or* the will of God?

Does Augustine give any clues about what he means about divine reason? Augustine, right after mentioning divine reason, describes the will of God as that, "... which commands that the natural order be preserved and forbids that it be disturbed," (317). As discussed in the section "On God" the natural order is understood to mean the structure and purpose of the universe as made by God. Since there is a natural progression in the text from divine reason to the will of God and a discussion about the natural order, it appears that Augustine believes that the divine reason of God is the plan of the Creator which undergirds creation.

The other, and perhaps more interesting issue, is why Augustine decided to use the conjunction *or* in between divine reason and will. His use of the word can mean either one of two things: that Augustine simply intends to use the two phrases interchangeably or because Augustine thinks that there is some real distinction between these two things. If Augustine is trying to describe a difference between the reason and will of God, then such a difference would be key to understanding revelation about God. But the text implies that Augustine is

using the terms reason and will of God interchangeably. For example, Augustine says that the eternal law is the will of God (319) and that the eternal law is the divine reason of God (317). Assuming that eternal law can be used as a transitive value, it appears that Augustine would use God's reason and His will interchangeably.

Augustine's discussion of sin is fairly conventional. How then does Augustine defend the fact that Abraham slept with a woman who was not his wife? Augustine's justification of Abraham's action is based on the argument that Abraham acted so as to follow the will of God and that the use of Hagar as Abraham's mistress was a legitimate exercise of Sarah's rights over her servant. By developing these two principles a better understanding of Augustine's argument will come into focus.

The first principle of Augustine's to examine is the claim that Abraham did not sin because he was only acting so as to fulfill the will of God. Augustine argues that Abraham did not sin in seeking to conceive a son through Hagar for three reasons: it is a part of the eternal law of God that human intercourse is meant for the propagation of the race (319), that Abraham's intention in having intercourse with Hagar was entirely focused upon the conception of a child (319), and that Sarah acted prudently in allowing Abraham to have intercourse with Hagar because Sarah could legitimately make a claim on the womb of her servant and because Sarah was infertile (320). An evaluation of these three contentions will illuminate Augustine's argument that Abraham was only acting to fulfill the will of God.

Augustine's starts out by arguing that the purpose of intercourse is the propagation of the human race. He says, "For that eternal law, that is, the will of God... permits the release of the delight of mortal flesh in intercourse from the dominion of reason... in order to provide

for the well-being of the [human] race,” (319). Augustine is arguing that Abraham is at least correct insofar as he is fulfilling the legitimate *telos* of sexual intercourse. This argument is especially relevant for Augustine because Faustus, Augustine’s opponent, is a Manichean. Manicheans were a group of early Christian heretics who thought the material world was sinful. As Augustine points out Mani, the father of Manichaeism, “...raved with the mad folly of avoiding children,” (319). Augustine’s argument is to show that sexual intercourse for the purposes of procreation is not *per se* immoral as the Manicheans argued but was in fact a noble intent in accord with the will of God.

Augustine’s second contention is that Abraham did not sin because his intention was to act in accord with the eternal law of God. Augustine says that, “...Abraham aimed at nothing by human intercourse but that a human being be born...” (319). This argument is part of the context discussed above of the Manichean belief in the sinfulness of the material world. This argument is also important though because it highlights a central element to Augustine’s defense of Abraham: namely, that Abraham acted blamelessly because his intention was to procreate. Augustine finds this intention to be praiseworthy because it is in accord with the *telos* of sexual intercourse, i.e. procreation. Augustine’s second contention is important because of its claim that Abraham intended to act in accord with the eternal law of God.

Augustine’s third contention helps to give context to the circumstances in which Abraham seeks to have a child with Hagar. Augustine says that, “For she [Sarah] did not defile her conscience by her husband’s crime... Rather, she too, wanting children in that natural order and knowing that she was sterile, claimed by legitimate authority the womb of

her maidservant for a use within her rights, not giving into a lustful husband but obeying his commands,” (320). Augustine is here arguing that the circumstances in which Abraham copulated with Hagar, the maidservant, are morally permissible because both Abraham and Sarah sought to act in accord with the *telos* or procreation, both Abraham and Sarah were trying to fulfill the natural end of procreation in spite of Sarah’s infertility, and Sarah was able to exercise a legitimate claim on the womb of her maidservant. Due to these three circumstances Augustine argues that Abraham and Sarah acted out of a “pious desire” (320) when seeking to bear an heir through Hagar.

After looking at this argument about the blamelessness of Abraham, there are still some lingering questions. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, this thesis seeks to find a model of interpretation that allows for a reading of the Old Testament that assuages some of the problems contemporary readers have with some of the texts of the Old Testament. Do Augustine’s arguments on the blamelessness of the Patriarchs and Prophets provide such an avenue for contemporary readers to enter into the Old Testament?

It would seem that Augustine’s defense of Abraham rests on some of the very actions that contemporary readers find objectionable. Some of these objections will be briefly touched upon.

Augustine’s defense of Abraham is built, in part, on the permissibility of adultery, i.e. extramarital sexual intercourse, and slavery, i.e. the authority over Hagar. But does this not ignore the very extramarital act through which Abraham sought to realize his good intention?

While Augustine may be correct to argue that procreation is a legitimate *telos* of sexual intercourse does he not ignore the unitive aspect of intercourse? As other theologians will argue, such as Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*, there is not only a procreative aspect to intercourse but a unitive aspect between husband and wife; it appears that Abraham's relations with Hagar completely disregards the unitive *telos* of procreation.

In addition to the problematic aspects of Abraham's relations with Hagar there is also the problematic issue of Augustine's claim that Sarah exercised legitimate authority over Hagar. Augustine's mind on the issue of slavery is made more explicit in his work *The City of God* wherein he writes:

The prime cause, then, of slavery is sin, which brings man under the dominion of his fellow,—that which does not happen save by the judgment of God, with whom is no unrighteousness, and who knows how to award fit punishments to every variety of offence. But our Master in heaven says, "Every one who doeth sin is the servant of sin." And thus there are many wicked masters who have religious men as their slaves, and who are yet themselves in bondage... (19.15)

Augustine admits that slavery is not a part of the natural order but is instead born from sin. He argues that therefore it is just for sinful people to be slaves as a punishment for sin but admits that in fact many times just people are slaves and unjust people are slave owners. Many contemporary people may be repelled by Augustine's claim that slavery is a just punishment to an offence but further Augustine himself admits that oftentimes just people are made slaves. Is this not a type of injustice for a just person to bear the offence due to unjust people? How can it be assumed that Hagar was justly a slave of Hagar under the Augustinian

model when absolutely nothing is none of Hagar's moral character? Augustine's own understanding of slavery *vis-à-vis* his acknowledgment that righteous people suffer the punishment of slavery and that it is an born from human sin argues only for slavery's abolition and not any claims to a legitimate authority between slave owner and slave.

This is not even to mention the fact that Augustine argues that Abraham is in part blameless because of his good intentionality. Elsewhere in the text Augustine argues that Abraham could have produced an heir for himself through adoption (320). If, building upon Augustine's discussion of good intentionality, Abraham had stolen somebody's child in order to have an heir would such an action be morally permissible since Abraham had a good intention?

Augustine's defense of the moral character of the Patriarchs and Prophets may be a partially fruitful avenue for contemporary readers to enter into the Old Testament insofar as it admits of the possibility that some dispensations may be appropriate for a certain time and place and are no longer appropriate for a later time and place. This theory of dispensations passing away can account for some of the issues that contemporary readers have with some texts of the Old Testament but this theory of dispensations, at least under the Augustinian model, relies on some premises that many contemporary readers would find objectionable such as the legitimate authority found in a relationship between a slave owner and a slave.

On the Appropriateness of God's Actions During Different Eras

The second argument that Augustine makes in defense of the unity of the two Testaments is that God legitimately acts differently in different eras of human history. In

order to fully appreciate Augustine's argument, again from *Contra Faustum*, he will be quoted at length:

A sick person ought not to criticize medical knowledge if it prescribes one thing for him today and another tomorrow, while it also forbids what it had earlier prescribed. For that is the way it is with the healing of his body. In the same way, the human race from Adam until the end of the world, sick and wounded as it is, as long as the corruptible body weighs down the soul, ought not to criticize the divine medicine if in certain matters it prescribed that the same thing be observed, while in certain others it earlier prescribed one thing and later another, especially since God promised that he would prescribe something else. (417).

This is written by Augustine in response to Faustus' claim that Augustine and his fellow Christians do not really follow the Old Testament, since if they did then they would follow all the laws as prescribed in the Old Testament. Augustine's response essentially says that as humanity's relationship with God changed, so too did the interactions in that relationship change; this view is sometimes called dispensationalism.

To illustrate this theory of dispensationalism Augustine's defense of the polygamy of Jacob can be used. Augustine says, "But now a general statement at the beginning acquits his son, Jacob, with regard to his four wives, which Faustus raised as an objection against him as an immense crime. After all, when it was the custom, it was not a crime. And it is now a crime because it is not the custom," (22.47). Augustine is here arguing that Jacob does not commit a grave offense, as Faustus alleges, because at the time such an action was not

considered a grave offense. Augustine's language about crimes against custom brings attention to his understanding that crimes can occur in three ways: against nature, against custom, or against commandment. Augustine says that Jacob did not commit any crimes in his polygamy because, "If you look to nature, he used those women...for begetting children. If you look to custom, this was the common practice at the time and in those lands. If you look to commandment, it was forbidden by no law," (22.47). This argument provides three classes of crimes that an individual could commit and Augustine argues that Jacob's actions do not fall into any of these classes.

Looking at these three classes of crimes Augustine's argument appears to run into some issues. The first issue is the claim that Jacob acted justly according to nature because he sought merely to engage in procreation; this argument has been dealt with elsewhere in this paper. Augustine's defense that the polygamy did not violate custom seems to be a specious argument. While this argument certainly puts Jacob's actions into context it does not actually address the content of Jacob's actions. If Augustine is alleging that Jacob did not sin against the customs of the times then he is certainly right but this argument completely ignores the question of whether or not what Jacob did was *per se* moral or immoral. Similarly Augustine may be correct in saying that Jacob did not break and commandment but this also avoids the more important question of whether or not what Jacob did was moral or immoral.

Conclusion on Augustine

So what is the value of Augustine's attempt to interpret the Old Testament? His attempt to defend the moral character of the Prophets and Patriarchs may be helpful in some instances but it is certainly deficient, at least for a contemporary reader, because it relies on

some moral justifications that simply would be rejected today. Augustine's discussion of dispensationalism, however, does seem to provide some grounds to begin to say that there were things in the Old Testament that may have been suited to those times, but are in fact inappropriate now. The question that remains is why some things would be appropriate at that time as opposed to late times. Additionally, it must be asked how to determine which things belong to previous dispensations and which things belong to later dispensations and how to determine the difference between the two.

John Calvin on the Old Testament

Another well-known theory for interpreting the Old Testament, called divine accommodation, was developed by John Calvin, the 16th century founder of the Calvinists. Calvin's theory is here presented after Augustine's theory because Calvin's discussion about the progressive relationship between Israel and God appears to be very similar to Augustine's argument about dispensationalism. Due to the potential similarity between these two theories, it will be beneficial to understand how Calvin explains the progressive relationship, i.e. one that improves over time, between Israel and God.

As described by David Wright in his article, "Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart, And Divine Accommodation in The Mosaic Harmony Commentary," there are three main elements to Calvin's interpretation of the Old Testament, which is called divine accommodation:

1. The belief that the people of Israel were in a primitive state and therefore God slowly worked to gradually improve their understanding (37)
2. The sayings of Jesus in the New Testament about parts of the Old Testament being concessions made to Israel by God because of the "hardness" of their hearts (37)

3. The idea of natural equity, i.e. that some aspects of the divine law survived intact in the conscience of human beings even though humanity was in a state of great depravity (38)

Before examining in depth the arguments that Calvin will make for his theory of divine accommodation it is worthwhile to note that much of his language may sound offensive to contemporary ears, especially when he talks about the ancient Israelites as having been primitive, barbaric, etc. It is more fruitful to think of divine accommodation not in the light of the “primitive” state of the ancient Israelites at the time but rather to look at the “primitive” state of the whole of human society during that era. This thesis in no way wishes to say anything to single out the ancient Israelites, especially in a negative way.

The first element of Calvin’s theory is the fact that the people of Israel were primitive and therefore God needed to gradually bring the people to a purer understanding of His revelation. An example of this can be found in Calvin’s *Harmony of the Law Commentary* wherein for Numbers 28:1 he says that, “... the rudeness of His [God’s] ancient people obliged Him to speak thus grossly...” This rudeness can be interpreted in the light of what is occurring in the verse upon which Calvin is commenting. In this verse God is commanding the Israelites in regards to certain sacrifices which must be made to God. These commands can be seen in the overall light of sacrifices in the Old Testament as both a sign of obedience to God’s will as well as a sign of faith and repentance. Therefore, within this context of sacrificial commandments, Calvin’s commentary points to his understanding that God is accommodating to a primitive moral state of the ancient Israelites.

In this sense of being morally primitive Calvin's claim does not seem to conflict too much with the texts of the Old Testament themselves. Much of the Old Testament is filled with stories of the sinfulness of the people of Israel insofar as they failed to live according to the law of God. Of many examples two prominent ones can be provided that encompass the people of Israel as a whole: the quickness with which the people fell into idolatry while Moses was on Mount Sinai for only forty days (Exodus 32), and the great preponderance of sinful kings of both Israel and Judah as related in 1 and 2 Kings.

This element of being primitive in Calvin's theory does not need only apply to the realm of morality though. There is also a certain sense in which the people of Israel could have been said to be primitive because of their limited intellectual resources. In order to better explain this aspect of being primitive intellectually Peter van Bemmele in his article, "Divine Accommodation and Biblical Creation: Calvin vs. McGrath," discusses a 2nd century debate, retold below, regarding the literal nature of the story about the six days of creation.

Celsus, the author of the oldest extant written criticism of Christianity, scoffs at the creation story found in Genesis for several reasons, in particular because of the fact that there are six days of creation. Celsus argues that it is impossible for this story to have been true because days are the product of the earth going around the sun and therefore before the earth actually went around the sun there were no such things as days. This seems like a very fair critique, especially to contemporary readers who live in a society where many people do not believe in creation being an act completed in six days. But during Celsus' time a literal belief in six day creationism was very common and therefore Celsus' critique proved extremely potent.

Philo responds to this critique in his work entitled *On Creation* wherein he says,

And he [Moses] says that the world was made in six days, not because the Creator stood in need of a length of time (for it is natural that God should do everything at once, not merely by uttering a command, but by even thinking of it); but because the things created required arrangement; and number is akin to arrangement...” (III. 13).

Here Philo is making the argument that the story about the six days of creation is not necessarily strictly about what actually happened but is instead a device used by Moses to make the story of creation intelligible to his audience. Imagine if instead of six day creationism God had tried to reveal to the people of Israel the whole history of evolution and cosmology; could it really be expected that the people would have been able to understand such revelation without the benefits of modern science? Therefore it can be seen that not only in a moral sense but also in an intellectual sense were the ancient Israelites in need of some form of accommodation by God because of their “primitive” state of their knowledge.

The second element upon which Calvin builds his theory of divine accommodation is upon the sayings of Jesus Christ in the New Testament where He talks about God making concessions in the Old Testament to the people of Israel because of the hardness of their hearts. One of the best known examples of this teaching is in the Gospel of St. Matthew chapter 19 which reads:

3. And the Pharisees came to him [Christ], tempting him, and saying to him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever? 4. Who answering said to them, Have you not read, that he who made them at first,

593 made them male and female? 5. And he said, Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall be one flesh. 6. Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh: what God therefore hath joined, let not man separate. 7. They say to him, Why then did Moses order to give a letter of divorcement, and send her away? 8. *He said to them, Moses, for the hardness of your heart, permitted you to divorce your wives; but at the beginning it was not so.* 9. And I say to you, That whosoever shall divorce his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. (emphasis added)

Calvin, commenting on this passage in his second volume of *The Harmony of the Gospels*, says, "...as the wickedness of men could not be restrained in any other way, he [Moses] applied what was the most admissible remedy..." Calvin is arguing that it was impossible for Moses to uphold the original plan of God for marriage because of the "wickedness" of men. Therefore in order to at least "restrain" their "wickedness" Moses does his best to accommodate the law of God to the concrete realities of a sinful world.

But why is this commentary from Calvin on a passage from the New Testament important for a study of the Old Testament? The importance of this saying from the New Testament is not built upon any claims to Christ's Divinity but rather because it is proof that among certain groups of Jewish teachers there was an understanding that there was some element of accommodation in the revelation between God and His people in the Old Testament. Jesus and Philo are two Jewish teachers of roughly contemporaneous lifetimes

who both present some argument in favor of accommodation in the Old Testament. While Calvin may use the reference to Christ to help bolster his understanding of Christian theology, this saying from the New Testament combined with other Jewish writings from a similar time period help to illustrate that the notion of divine accommodation is present within the Jewish community as it reflects upon the meaning of revelation given in the Old Testament.

The final element of Calvin's theory of divine accommodation is built upon something he calls natural equity. Wright describes natural equity in Calvin's thought as, "a compound of natural law, moral law, and the law written on the conscience of which the Decalogue is the perfect embodiment..." (38). This can be understood simply as those moral conventions which it appears that all human beings agree to. Calvin even goes on to remark that, "among the pagan peoples," such precepts of natural equity were recognized and followed (*Calvini Opera* 24: 662). For Calvin this category is used to describe those aspects of the Mosaic law which are not, as Wright calls it, examples of the law which are not examples of, "... divine indulgence toward human ineptitude or corruption," (38). This category is used by Calvin to show that even though humanity may have been in a state of great depravity that some aspects of the divine law written on the conscience of human beings survived intact. Therefore not all of the Mosaic law is an act of divine accommodation insofar as there is an overlap between aspects of the Mosaic law and the moral principles which can be observed as operative among many different groups of people at many different times, even among the so-called pagan nations.

One of the major obstacles that arises from the use of divine accommodation theory is the possibility that such a theory actually diminishes the role of revelation in coming to understand God. In fact Calvin says in the Introduction to the *Institutes*, “...I can at least promise that [the *Institutes*] can be a key to open a way for all children of God into good and right understanding of Holy Scripture,” (7). If Calvin offers this theory of divine accommodation as a key to an accurate understanding of Sacred Scripture then is not the emphasis shifted from revelation to his rational inquiry into revelation? Does divine accommodation really help to make intelligible the fundamentals of revelation or does it really lead away from revelation?

This is a difficult question. It can be answered in two ways: what, if any, other paths to knowledge are permitted or encouraged by the revelation found in the Old Testament and are there any clear examples of divine accommodation within the revelation of the Old Testament itself. A discussion on at least one path of knowledge aside from revelation is discussed in this thesis under the section on, “On Reason in the Old Testament.” The second way, that of finding clear examples of divine accommodation within the Old Testament itself, warrants further inquiry.

When discussing the theory of divine accommodation one must always be aware of the criticism that divine accommodation is a method of explaining away the apparent inconsistencies or cruelty found in the deposit of revelation. This is a very real criticism. If it is said in the Old Testament that the sins of the father shall not be visited upon the son and *vice versa* (Deuteronomy 24:16) while it is also said that the sins of the father will be visited upon his sons (Exodus 20:5) then it would appear that there is not an issue of divine

accommodation in revelation but simply that revelation is incoherent. What would help legitimize the theory of divine accommodation is if there was a clear indication that divine accommodation according to the mold presented by John Calvin and others can be clearly found as presented in the Old Testament and not just inferred through the reflection of theologians; such an example should help to dispel the criticism that accommodation is a theory invented by theologians to explain away some vexing passages from the Old Testament.

In 1 Samuel 8 there appears to be just such a clear example of divine accommodation. The relevant passage is as follows from 1 Samuel 8:1-22:

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. ² The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. ³ Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah ⁵ and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." ⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the Lord. ⁷ And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but *they have rejected me from being king over them.*" ⁸ According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, *forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.* ⁹ Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

¹⁰ So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him. ¹¹ He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your

sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. ¹² And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. ¹⁵ He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. ¹⁶ He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men^{al} and your donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ *And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day.*”

¹⁹ *But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us,* ²⁰ *that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”* ²¹ And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. ²² And the Lord said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king.” Samuel then said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.” (emphasis added)

While this passage may be long it very clearly demonstrates two important aspects of Calvin’s theory of divine accommodation: the first principle that God needed to accommodate His revelation to the people because of a lack of spiritual maturity and the second principle that aspects of revelation in the Old Testament were concessions made to the hardness of the hearts of the people.

In this passage how is it seen that God is accommodating His revelation to an undeveloped spiritual state on the part of His people? God says that the people have rejected Him as their king and wish to be led by earthly kings. It would appear that such a request

must be born from a lack of faith. In His response God makes mention specifically of how He led the people out of their bondage in Egypt. This calls to mind many of the fantastic miracles of the Exodus: the signs of God's power displayed before Pharaoh, the parting of the Red Sea, the Pillars of Fire and Smoke, the quail and manna from Heaven, etc.

These are incredible displays of God's power that the Israelites were to have personally witnessed and told to their children; nor are these the only feats of God's power that the people of Israel are to have witnessed. Yet these people still wish to have a mere mortal lead them so that, among other things, they can follow someone physically into battle. They pass up the awesome power of God so that they can have a chariot to run behind into battle. If one were to really believe in the power and miracles of God and His kingship over the people then certainly one would not want to be led by a mere mortal. Yet the people cry out to God for a mortal king thereby indicating a lack of faith in God.

Secondly this passage from 1 Samuel also illustrates the hardness of heart on the part of the people. God has Samuel tell the people all the hardships that will befall them because of the rule of a king. In spite of all of this the people reject the warnings of God and Samuel and demand to have a king, in part so that they can be like other nations; nations from which Israel is meant to be set apart. In fact the text seems to suggest that if God had not accommodated this request on the part of the people that they would have completely abandoned their covenant with Him.

Conclusion

Based on the above passage from the Book of Samuel, it seems plausible that John Calvin's theory of divine accommodation is a plausible hermeneutic for reading the Old Testament. Using the above cited passage from Samuel, it can be argued that the Old Testament itself is in some way aware of the limitations that are born from the revelation of an infinite God to a finite creation. So while it may be said that Calvin's theory of divine accommodation is useful hermeneutic for Old Testament interpretation, a clear standard for evaluating this hermeneutic has not yet been identified. A similar problem was identified at the end of the chapter on Augustine, i.e. by what standard can one be sure that he is applying the theory of dispensationalism or divine accommodation appropriately? A tool must be developed in order to determine when the theories of dispensationalism or accommodation should be applied. In order to find such a tool, it would now be prudent to move on to the work of Thomas Aquinas.

Aquinas on the Old Testament

After examining the interpretative models of Augustine and Calvin, it would now be fruitful to examine the interpretative model of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, like Augustine and Calvin, relies on human weakness and sinfulness in order to explain, in part, the portrayal of God as found in the Old Testament. The major difference between Aquinas and the other two thinkers, though, is that Aquinas explicitly identifies the tool he will use to evaluate whether or not human sinfulness or weakness as influenced the text of the Old Testament. Drawing upon the text of the Old Testament itself, Aquinas identifies reason as the standard against which an interpretation of the Old Testament can be measured.

In his article “Aquinas on the Divisions of the Ages: Salvation History in the Summa,” J. Mark Armitage discusses how Aquinas understands salvation history as a succession of different epochs. This understanding comes to Aquinas through Augustine. Augustine, when describing the different eras of salvation history, uses descriptions such as this one from *De Vera Religione*, “To heal souls God uses all sorts of means suitable to the times...” (xvi, 30). For Augustine it can be observed that God relates to His creation in different ways at different times. These actions differ because of their suitability to the various eras in human history. Aquinas, building upon the foundation laid by Augustine,

divides the three eras of salvation history into the Natural Law, the Old Law, and the New Law.

Aquinas succinctly describes the three eras of salvation history in his *Summa Theologica* thus:

...first of all God left human beings under the Natural Law, with the freedom of their will, in order that they might know their natural strength; and when they failed in it, they received the law; whereupon, by the fault, not of the law, but of their nature, the disease gained strength; so that having recognized their infirmity they might cry out for a physician, and beseech the aid of grace. (*ST* III 1.5)

This understanding of the threefold nature of salvation history is driven by three main principles: the natural law is the starting point for salvation history, the Old Law was not perfectly followed, i.e. that because of the brokenness of human nature after the Fall it was impossible for human beings to observe and fulfill the precepts of the Old Law on the power of their own strength, and that the first two laws are perfected in the New Law. By digging into these principles, particularly the first two principles, Aquinas' views on and interpretation of the Old Testament begin to develop and take shape.

What is the natural law? As discussed in *The First Part of the Second Part* of the *Summa* in question 94, the natural law consists in the principles of goodness which are written into the hearts of all people, or as Aquinas says they "... are principles, the habit of which we possess." Aquinas is using the words principle and habit very specifically. First is

must be understood what Aquinas means by habit. When expounding upon what it means to possess the habit of the natural law Aquinas, in the same question 94, describes it analogously as how a child possesses the habit of reason even though, due to age, he may not be able to exercise the habit of reason. He explicitly says in the above mentioned analogy that, "...sometimes a man is unable to make use of that which is in him habitually." From this statement it can be inferred that Aquinas sees habit, at least in regards to the natural law, to be those things which exist in a person regardless of whether or not people use this habit. It can be understood what Aquinas means by principle by looking at his chain of thought in question 94. He starts by talking about the, "precepts of the natural law," which can exist in either two ways: demonstrably or indemonstrably. When speaking of the precepts of the natural law in speculative matters, i.e. indemonstrable matters, Aquinas says the precepts of the natural law, "...are principles, the habit of which we possess." It can be seen then that by principle Aquinas here means the precepts of the natural law.

Based on Aquinas' understanding of the terms habit and principle it can be inferred that for Aquinas the natural law is the plan of creation as written into the world, especially into the hearts of human beings, by God. The natural law participates in the eternal law of God, which as discussed by Aquinas in question 93 is nothing other than the "Divine Wisdom" of God. Finally, again from question 94, it can be observed that human beings can come to know the natural law because it is proper to all people, "... to be inclined to the use of reason." So what exactly does all of this mean?

First, it is critical to Aquinas' thought to understand that the natural law is written into creation by God. Why is this important? Because by understanding this it can be understood

that the natural law is the path along which creation follows to fulfill its God-given purpose, i.e. its *teleos*. Aquinas says in question 94, “Since, however, good has the nature of an end... hence it is [a] thing to which man has a natural inclination, [is] naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as [an] object of pursuit ... Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law.” Aquinas is making the case that human beings have a purpose which is the pursuit of the good. Purpose here being what human beings are made to do, e.g. just as a remote is meant to operate a television so too are human beings meant to pursue the good. Aquinas argues that the natural law is the path along which human beings desire to follow by nature, and that this path leads to goodness as its ultimate end. Further he argues that this path is understood through the use of reason.

Second, by defining the natural law as that which participates in the Divine Wisdom of God it can be observed that the natural law shares in one of the immutable characteristics of God. Aquinas makes the importance of this relationship explicit in question 94 when he says, “Secondly, a change in the natural law may be understood by way of subtraction... In this sense, the natural law is altogether unchangeable in its first principles...” What does this mean? Does Aquinas really mean that the natural law *per se* changes or does he really mean that the natural law is “altogether unchangeable”?

Aquinas speaks of the natural law as being both open to change and unchangeable because of a certain dichotomy in his understanding of the natural law. He sees the natural law as being divided into its first principles and into its secondary principles. By understanding what Aquinas means by the second principles of the natural law it can be

inferred what the first principles of the natural law are and also what aspects of the natural law can be changed through the method of subtraction. Aquinas in question 94 article 4 discusses an example in which the secondary principles of the natural law are seen as distinct from the primary principles. To quote Aquinas at length:

Thus it is right and true for all to act according to reason: [for example] goods entrusted to another should be restored to their owner. Now this is true for the majority of cases: but it may happen in a particular case that it would be injurious, and therefore unreasonable, to restore goods held in trust; for instance, if they are claimed for the purpose of fighting against one's country...

Consequently we must say that the natural law, as to general principles, is the same for all, both as to rectitude and as to knowledge. But as to certain matters of detail, which are conclusions, as it were, of those general principles, it is the same for all in the majority of cases... and yet in some few cases it may fail, both as to rectitude, by reason of certain obstacles (just as natures subject to generation and corruption fail in some few cases on account of some obstacle), and as to knowledge, since in some the reason is perverted by passion, or evil habit, or an evil disposition of nature

Therefore it can be seen that for Aquinas there is the natural law itself and there is the natural law as it is applied in within various different circumstances. For Aquinas the natural law itself subsists in the “general” principles, but these primary principles when applied in “particular” cases are called secondary principles. Therefore Aquinas can maintain that the

primary principles are unchangeable while saying that the secondary principles can be changed. The primary principles of the natural law are the natural law itself while the secondary principles are the applications of the natural law within the context of human experience.

Aquinas argues that fundamentally nothing may be removed from the essence of the natural law. He believes that certain secondary principles of the natural law may cease to be, i.e. human applications inferred from the first principles of the natural law may cease to exist. But any change in the conclusions drawn from the natural law does not affect the first principles of the natural law. By linking the natural law with the eternal law Aquinas makes it clear that the natural law is constant. Therefore if it is immoral according to the natural law to murder somebody then it will always be immoral to murder somebody.

Finally, it is important for Aquinas that the natural law can be discovered through the use of reason. Since, as Aquinas argues, the natural law helps human beings to fulfill their teleological end, and reason helps human beings to know the natural law, then reason is necessary for human beings to fulfill the dictates of the natural law. Therefore what is good must in some way be intelligible to human reason. By making reason the standard against which the natural law is known, Aquinas also makes reason a metric for understanding what is good. Furthermore, since the natural law is timeless then it can be inferred that the dictates of reason are in some way timeless, i.e. since the natural law is unchangeable, and the natural law is intelligible to reason, then reason must also in some way be unchangeable in order to always maintain a correlation with the unchangeable natural law.

From this foundation of the natural law Aquinas moves on to his discussion about the Old Law, of which he is previously quoted as saying, "... and when they (humanity) failed in it (the observance of the Natural Law), they received the law (the Old Law)..." This position taken by Aquinas echoes St. Paul in Galatians 3:24 about the Mosaic Law being a pedagogue, i.e. a teacher or disciplinarian. Aquinas helps to explain this position though by answering the question: what way was the Law a pedagogue? Aquinas argues that Old Law was given because humanity had failed in its ability to follow the natural law, i.e. humanity had fallen into sin. Aquinas will be very explicit about this relationship between the sinfulness of humanity and the giving of the Old Law, for example in *ST I.98.6.1*, where he says, "... it was not fitting for the Old Law to be given at once after the sin of the first human beings... because humans were so confident in their own reason, that they did not acknowledge their need of the Old Law, since as yet the dictate of the Natural Law was not darkened by habitual sinning." From the reasoning Aquinas uses here it can be inferred that the Old Law was given because human beings had become so sinful they no longer knew the limits of their own reason and because they had lost the "habit" of the natural law through constant sinning; the Old Law taught the natural law which humanity had forgotten through the darkening of sin. By exploring these claims a better picture of Aquinas' thought about the Old Law can be developed.

It is critical to understand Aquinas' implicit claim about the limits of human reason. In *ST I.1.1* Aquinas says:

Even regarding those truths about God that human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that human beings should be taught by a divine

revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would be known only by a few, and that after a long time, and with the mixing in of many errors.

It can be seen here that Aquinas believes firmly believes in reason as a path to truth, but that he doubts the ability of humans to actually use reason well and to follow it faithfully. This doubtfulness in human ability, driven by Aquinas' belief in Original Sin, begins the transition into his next claim about the Old Law being given to humanity because of its sinfulness.

Based on the line, "... since as yet the dictate of the Natural Law was not darkened by habitual sinning..." it can be inferred here that Aquinas believes that the Old Law was given in large part because of the sinfulness of humanity. Humanity had fallen into such grave sin that it no longer understood the very laws written into creation. The remedy then was for God to interact with His creation in a personal way because Aquinas, inferring from his passage above, believes that at some point sin inhibits the ability of human beings to know and follow the natural law. When humanity reaches that point of grave sin then humanity's only hope is that God intervenes to help them to know and follow the law once again. Aquinas sees the Old Law as a response by God to help all people once again discover and follow the natural law.

Aquinas, as quoted previously, claims that, "...they received the law; whereupon, by the fault, not of the law, but of their nature, the disease (concupiscence) gained strength..." This quote is central for understanding Aquinas' read of the Old Testament for two reasons: it clearly states that there is nothing wrong with the Old Law *per se* and that the problems found in the era of the Old Law are attributable to the brokenness of human nature. Aquinas

here makes a delicate but clear distinction between the Old Law itself and the behavior of those who received the Old Law. The key to navigating this distinction lies in the ability to determine what properly belongs to the law and what properly belongs to humans involved in the Old Testament.

Earlier in this discussion Aquinas' understanding of the natural law and the use of reason in regards to the natural law was described. Based on his argument that the natural law is the plan according to which creation fulfills its purpose, it can be inferred that Creator, Who wrote the natural law, would only give a Law which would help to fulfill this purpose. Based upon this inference it can be argued that the Old Law will build upon and not destroy or oppose the work of the natural law. In fact Aquinas admits that divine revelation can add to human understanding of the natural law when he says, "A change in the natural law may be understood in two ways, first, by way of addition. In this sense... many things for the benefit of human life have been added over and above the natural law... by the Divine Law..." Based on this understanding between the natural law and the divine law Aquinas envisions that the natural law may be added to, but that such additions do not oppose the natural law. Since the natural law is known through reason if human beings are to be able to make sense of any additions to the natural law then those additions must in some way be intelligible through reason. If reason is the fundamental language of the natural law and the divine law enhances the natural law then the divine law must in some way share in the rational language of the natural law.

Building upon this notion that the Old Law must in some way be intelligible to the rational framework of the natural law then the contents of the Old Law itself can begin to be

examined. Through reason it can be observed that the natural law is meant to help bring things towards their natural ends (as discussed earlier in this section). Therefore if the Old Law is in accord with the natural law it should be seen that the Old Law either helps to bring a thing towards its perfection or at the very least does not hinder such a process. Anything that hinders the natural end as understood through the natural law becomes suspect as something not from God because it appears to be in discord with the plan that He has written into creation. Those things which are unreasonable can fall into two categories: things which are truly unreasonable and therefore are in some sense contrary to or not a part of the Old Law and those things which are actually reasonable but are beyond the strength of human reason. Things in this second category are discussed in more depth in the section of this thesis on reason. In order to fully understand Aquinas' interpretation of the Old Testament more time needs to be spent examining those things in the first category.

In theory it is easy to say that those things which are unreasonable do not belong to either the natural or old laws, but the texts of the Old Testament complicate this theory. For example in the Old Law Abraham is told by God to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22), yet does not this violate the natural law prohibition against murder as well as other places in the Old Testament which prohibit child sacrifice, e.g. Leviticus 20: 2-5? How is this apparent discrepancy negotiated?

In addition to Aquinas' discussion about the sinfulness of humanity, this apparent discrepancy is negotiated by Aquinas' emphasis on the difference between things given directly by God and those things given to humanity mediated through other human beings. (This distinction is particular to his understanding of the Old Testament; such mediation

through humanity is not doubted as much under the New Law due to the new role of grace in salvation history). Aquinas says in *ST II.I.100*, “The precepts of the decalogue differ from the other precepts of the Law, in the fact that God Himself is said to have given the precepts of the decalogue; whereas He gave the other precepts to the people through Moses.” Here Aquinas makes it clear that there is a difference between the Law as given by God and the law as mediated through human beings such as Moses. Further on in the same paragraph Aquinas talks about how knowledge of things can either come through divine infusion or by being taught from the reflection of wise men. In this distinction is found one possible way to explain the difference Aquinas mentions between the Decalogue coming from God Himself and the other precepts coming from God to the people through Moses. Such precepts through Moses can be seen in the light of Aquinas claim of, “... those (principles) which the careful reflection of wise men shows to be in accord with reason ... the people receive these principles from God, through being taught by wise men.” These precepts apart from the Decalogue can be said to come in some way from human beings instead of from God Himself, regardless of the legitimacy of these precepts. In this way it can start to be seen that there may be a way in viewing the Old Law which allows for a nuanced understanding of divine revelation.

If, as Aquinas argues, there is a distinction between the Old Law as given by God Himself and the Old Law as given through the precepts born from the reflection of wise men, then the question begins to be in what ways does this reflection through human beings influence the mediation of the Old Law? In this thesis there are many theories which are presented to help explain some of the ways in which human involvement in mediation can

affect the product of revelation: as seen in the section on Divine Accommodation limited human intellects may affect revelation by explaining creation in 6 days instead of through evolution and in this section habitual sin may inhibit the ability of human beings to know and follow the natural law. The fundamental picture that develops is that the limitations of human nature in some way limit the ability with which people are able to listen to and understand revelation. In this developing picture of human limitation it begins to be possible to see how there are things to be found in the Old Testament which are not from God *per se* but rather are products from God through the reflection of wise men.

What does this reflection mean though? Perhaps Aquinas is most explicit in his explanation of the interplay between the law from God and the law from God through the reflection of wise men when he says "... while those [principles] which are known through wise men are contained, conversely, as conclusions in their principles [the general principles/precepts of the natural law]." (*ST II.I.100*). Aquinas is arguing that the reflection of the wise men results in conclusions in the precepts of the natural law and does not in fact constitute the natural law itself. Aquinas' description of these reflections resulting in conclusions in the precepts of the natural law echoes his previous discussion of two types of natural law: the immutable principles of the natural law and the mutable principles of the natural law that result from a rational attempt to apply the general precepts of the natural law in a particular circumstance. It can be inferred from this quote that Aquinas sees the reflection of the wise men to be an attempt to apply the natural law, which is written by God Himself, to the various circumstances of their times. Therefore such reflection falls into the category of principles drawn from the natural law; such principles are mutable and indeed

can at times be fallible. Further Aquinas will argue that this reflection was performed by the wise men to "... be in accord with reason," (*ST* II.I.100). Aquinas sees the reflection of the wise men as an attempt to act reasonably. If reason is the standard that the wise men are striving to follow then it becomes a measure against which their reflection can be judged.

What does this all mean though for Aquinas' interpretation of the Old Testament? Well, Aquinas believes in the role of the natural law as fundamental to the nature of the universe, and that the natural law can be known through reason. Then, building upon the natural law, God gives the Old Law after humanity becomes aware of its sinfulness. During the period under the Old Law humanity fails in its ability to follow the Law. Additionally the Old Law must be divided between that which comes directly from God and that which is mediated through the human recipients of the Law. (Aquinas' interpretation will go one step further to talk about how the natural and old laws are teleologically perfected in the New Law, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.)

Based on his overall understanding of the Old Testament, it seems that Aquinas would argue for reason as a principle against which the Old Testament can be interpreted. Being mindful of the limitations of human reason, Aquinas still believes that it is useful for understanding the natural law. Therefore anything which clearly contradicts the natural law should not be ascribed to God and therefore should in some way be understood to belong either to the sinfulness of humanity or the human mediation of the Old Testament.

Conclusion

This model of interpretation has many strengths. It provides a clear, explicit, systematic approach for interpreting the Old Testament. It can appear to be too heavily focused on the strength of human reason and not on the gift of revelation from God, but Aquinas is sure to make clear that the natural law is always open to and informed by divine revelation. It now remains to be seen whether such an interpretation can at least be supported in part by the Old Testament itself and also what an interpretation based on this model would look like.

The Old Testament: Interpretation and Hermeneutic

The Old Testament presents an obstacle to many contemporary readers because it appears to be discordant with the idea of a loving God. The question then becomes if there is any way to read the Old Testament so that it is harmonious with the image of a loving God. In the light of this desire to find a loving hermeneutic for reading the Old Testament, Thomas Aquinas provides a potential hermeneutic with the use of reason. It will now be explored in what ways the Old Testament is open to the use of interpretation in general and the use of a rational hermeneutic in particular.

One of the ways a text may require a reader to engage in critical interpretation and analysis is when the text asks the reader to look for something new to enter into a tradition. One verse in particular is famous in the Old Testament for its apparent claim that the Lord will institute a new type of Covenant with His People. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 it is written:

³¹ [a]“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³ But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my

people.³⁴ And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

For the purposes of this thesis the debate about what type of "new covenant" is being discussed and whether or not this covenant is a prophecy of the covenant promised by Christ will be set aside. Rather, for this thesis, the main importance of this passage is the fact that it introduces a distinction between how the covenant had existed prior to this prophecy of Jeremiah and how the covenant will be new, i.e. different, at some time after this prophecy of Jeremiah's.

This passage from Jeremiah pivots on two phrases, "...new covenant..." and "...my covenant which they broke..." The first phrase is important because it introduces some type of distinction between an old and new covenant. The second phrase is important because it offers a potential hermeneutic for analyzing the covenant which precedes the one prophesied by Jeremiah.

It is incredibly important that Jeremiah describes a new covenant, and thereby also implicitly indicates that there is an old covenant. While many scholars will argue that the prophecy does not mean anything more than the internalization of the Law by the entire Jewish people, like David Rhymer in his simply titled "Jeremiah 31:31-34," and still others argue that this passage is a clear prophecy of the coming work of Christ, like Jack Pearl Lewis in his "The Lord has Created a New Thing on the Earth," neither of these debates are important for this paper. The importance of this passage is that it shows that there is more revelation to come from God to the people of Israel. There is to be a new type of covenant

and therefore some sort of analytical and interpretative work will eventually need to be done by the people of Israel so that they can both recognize the new covenant and also synthesis with the Jewish tradition that existed up until the point of this new covenant.

The introduction of any new element demands interpretation. Newness requires that that a situation be reevaluated and also therefore interpreted. By saying there is to be a new covenant of some kind, the implication is being made that some sort interpretative and analytical exercise is needed in order to be able to make sense of the new whole. It is this reevaluation of the situation that is so important because when something new develops in a tradition it forces requires a reevaluation of the understanding of the tradition as a whole. It is impossible to simply pretend that a tradition remains unaffected when it grows, i.e. when something more is added. In order to understand this newness, this effect on the tradition, analysis and interpretation must be used.

Furthermore Jeremiah implies that the new covenant will be established by God because the previous covenant had been “broke” by the people of Israel. This verse is important because it suggests a lens through which the old covenant can be evaluated. This passage clearly suggests that it is not God Who failed in the covenant, but rather the people. By making sure to mention that the covenant is broken by the people, Jeremiah provides a lens through which the covenantal relationship between God and His People Israel can be evaluated. As mentioned, a new covenant carries with it the implication that there must be some type of interpretive and analytical exercise; this second phrase from the selected passage of Jeremiah suggests a lens through which such interpretation and analysis can be performed.

It would appear so far from the text of the Old Testament itself that those who enter into a reading of the Old Testament need to be prepared for a process of critical interpretation and analysis. It would also appear that the Old Testament suggests a lens through which the text may be interpreted, i.e. by examining the Old Testament according to the quality and nature of the relationship between the people of Israel and God.

But revelation need not merely be understood simply as the Word of God as written down and preserved for and by the people. Rather the act of revelation must necessarily include the community which receives the revelation as argued by many theologians, such as Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*. If the community which receives the revelation is integral to the revelation, then it should be possible to better understand the revelation by coming to understand the community in which the revelation is received. For the purposes of this thesis, the community which will be examined is one Jewish group which explicitly expresses hope in a promised messiah; by expressing hope for something that is to come, i.e. something that is new, there can be found a similar opening for an interpretive key as discussed above during the gloss on the passage from the prophet Jeremiah.

Many groups of Jewish people throughout history have hoped for a messianic figure. One group in particular, the community of the Essenes at Qumran, helps to illustrate this point. As discussed in the book *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* under the section “Qumran Sectarian Literature” there was a fervent belief among the Essene community in a coming Messiah. The Essene community expressed this belief in many of their writings (p. 539) and also in many of their understandings of various Old Testament

verses (p. 540-1). For the purposes of this paper these beliefs are important because they emphasize an expectation of something more to come. This messiah which is to come will be a new addition to the revelation that God had already given to His People. By expressing a fervent belief in something more, something new, to come from God to His People the Essenes are required to engage in interpretation and analysis; this relationship between newness and interpretation was discussed more thoroughly above.

By saying that something new is to come one is implicitly saying that there must also come a time of interpretation and analysis. By looking at the actual text of the Old Testament and at one of the communities which are steeped in the tradition of the Old Testament, it is possible to see that there is an expectation of something new, of something more to be given, i.e. revealed, to the people of Israel. With the ushering in of something new there necessarily follows a period of interpretation and analysis to make sense of the new whole.

Reason as Presented in the Old Testament

If, as argued earlier, entering into the Jewish tradition requires some level of interpretation and analysis of the Old Testament, then the decision must be made as to what sort of means will be employed to interpret the text. A great number of things present themselves as tools with which to interpret the Old Testament: anthropology, linguistics, archeology, etc.; in this paper, reason will be evaluated as the tool by which to interpret and analyze the Old Testament.

As an attempt is made to determine what sort of tool is suited to the task of interpreting the Old Testament, there presents a problem similar to issue as discussed about

interpreting the Old Testament: on what grounds do human beings presume to decide by which means a text revealed by God will be interpreted? The use of reason as a tool, just like the question of interpretation, will be evaluated according to textual evidence from the Old Testament as well as according to the use of such a hermeneutic found among some members of the ancient Jewish community.

The textual evidence found in the Old Testament can be broken down into two major categories: basic and extensive proofs. For the sake of completeness the basic proofs will be briefly mentioned while the more extensive proofs will merit more thorough analysis and discussion.

In regards to basic proofs, several verses from the Old Testament clearly support the view that reason can be used as a path to knowledge and wisdom. One of the most powerful verses that deals with reason in the Old Testament is found in the first chapter of the Book of Isaiah wherein it is written, “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool,” (Isaiah 1:18). In this quote the Lord Himself is inviting His People through one of the major Prophets to engage in the use of reason. Therefore, if the Lord is inviting His People to use reason then it seems apparent that the text of the Old Testament is open to the use of reason as an appropriate tool for understanding.

Another similarly important Old Testament verse dealing with reason is 1 Samuel 12:7, in which Samuel explicitly states, “Now therefore, stand still, that I (Samuel) may reason with you before the Lord.” Clearly in this quote from the Old Testament a Prophet of the Lord is explicitly inviting the people of the Lord to engage in the use of reason in the

presence of the Lord Himself; this clearly indicates that reason can work harmoniously with the revelation found in the Old Testament.

On the basis of basic proofs alone it would appear that the Old Testament views reason as something that can be used by humanity as a means through which to engage the world and to relate to God. But the Old Testament support of reason goes even deeper than simply a few important verses. Several of the books of the Old Testament itself seem almost uniquely concerned with the use of human reason within the context of experiential knowledge; the commentary on wisdom and knowledge in these books allow for a more extensive analysis on the nature of reason as understood in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament there are several books which together form what is called “wisdom literature.” The books of wisdom literature in the Old Testament include Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, and for some also include Sirach, Song of Songs, and Wisdom; in this paper the focus will be on the three most widely accepted wisdom books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

One of the common threads across these three books is the belief that wisdom can be gained through experience. In his book *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* James Crenshaw states that the wisdom tradition, “... asks what is good for men and women and it believes that all essential answers can be learned in the experience, pregnant with signs about reality itself.” The wisdom literature is unique among the books in the Old Testament because it is concerned entirely with practical wisdom found in the everyday experiences of human existence. Wisdom literature, as John Collins tells says in *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, strikes a, “... contrast with the Torah and Prophets... The people of Israel

and its history and destiny are not even mentioned... The subject matter is drawn from everyday life..." (p. 2). Wisdom literature is unique precisely because it is drawn from human experience as opposed to the Law and Prophets which is entirely dependent on the revelation of God to His People. Wisdom literature represents a type of knowledge that is to be accessible to everybody without the special intervention of God in the course of human events.

By drawing upon human experience it can be seen that wisdom literature shows that there are paths to knowledge aside from revelation by which humanity can come to know things. The literature of the Old Testament is distinctly open to the possibility that human beings can come to know at least part of the truth outside of the special revelation made by God to His People. Furthermore the text provides one avenue through which knowledge may be gained, namely experience.

This acceptance of experience as a path to knowledge opens up significant possibilities insofar as reason can be used as a legitimate lens through which to understand the Old Testament. In many ways this understanding of experience as a path to knowledge is similar to the Aristotelian and Thomistic conceptions of sense cognition, i.e. through the use of the senses humanity can come to knowledge of things. Experiential knowledge and sense cognition are very similar ideas insofar as both concepts agree that through interaction with the world around them human beings are able to grow in wisdom/knowledge. But this emphasis on knowledge gained through experience, and not dependent on God, is especially important because it presupposes the human faculty to understand and make sense of

experience, i.e. it presupposes reason. Therefore it can be said that based on the wisdom books of the Old Testament that the Old Testament encourages rational inquiry.

Evidence for the openness of the Old Testament to the use of reason is not only limited to textual evidence. In the believing community which receives and carries within itself the revelation of the Old Testament there are found many individuals who are open to the use of reason as a part of the inquiry into understanding the Old Testament. One can look to two major sources as examples of members of the Jewish community being open to and using reason as a tool for understanding and inquiring of the Old Testament: Philo of Alexandria and the group of translators of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish philosopher and thinker who lived from 20 BC to 50 AD. In his works Philo seeks to synthesize his Jewish faith with the concepts he had learned in Greek philosophy. For Philo there is no contradiction between revelation as received in the Old Testament and reason as found through the reflection of the philosophers. In fact, he considers reason as a means through which humanity can come to understand God in some ways. Philo, as described in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, "... distinguishes in a general way between the lesser mystery of knowing God through creation and the greater mystery in which man experiences the vision of God Himself... other men (non-Jews) share in a certain knowledge of God through creation and reason..." (p. 272-3). This is a clear embrace of the understanding that reason and faith can and do work together in a harmonious way.

Philo serves as an important example of the openness of the Jewish community to the use of reason as a tool for understanding the Old Testament because he is at the same time

devoutly Jewish and intensely engaged in the use of reason. Philo, as a member deeply rooted in the Jewish faith and tradition, feels that this tradition is open to the understanding and use of reason that can be found outside of the structures of divine revelation. As such Philo, as a prominent member of the community which both receives and carries on the revelation from God found in the Old Testament, exhibits that there is an openness to the use of reason found within the culture that carries the Old Testament within itself.

Conclusion

The point of the preceding efforts at textual interpretation and cultural understanding are of course limited. Not every member of the Jewish community would agree with the understanding of wisdom presented above; nor would every member of the Jewish community agree with the work of Philo or the translation of the Old Testament into Greek. The understanding of the Old Testament and its reception within the various communities found within the Jewish tradition which has received and carries on this tradition is diverse and multifaceted. But, for the purposes of this paper, the central task is to understand whether or not the Old Testament is open to any sort of interpretation and analysis, and if so whether or not reason can be in any way be justified as a tool through which to view the Old Testament. The hope is that such textual and cultural analysis, however limited, has served this purpose.

On God in His Nature and in His Revelation

If reason is to be used as tool with which to interpret the Old Testament, it is important to investigate what can be known about God through rational reflection. It is especially important to determine what can be known about God's nature, and consequently how God would act with creation because of His nature. This section will in large part focus on the relationship between God and good and evil because, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the goodness of God and the perceived evil in the Old Testament is the major focus of this thesis. It is also worth noting that there is not a consensus on what reason is, and that for the purposes of this thesis reason is herein being used according the method of reflection described by Thomas Aquinas.

In order to begin it would be helpful to define what exactly is meant by the word God. In *Words of Wisdom* John W. Carlson defines God, "As approached philosophically, the Absolute and Necessary Being; also the... Uncased Cause..." (118). For the purposes of this thesis this aspect of Carlson's definition will be most important. By unpacking this understanding of God as the Absolute and Necessary Being it is necessary to develop an adequate understanding of the nature of God.

First, it is important to understand why God would be called the Absolute and Necessary Being. This title can only be fully appreciated within the context of Aquinas', and others', understanding of necessary and contingent beings. In his book *Aquinas* Edward Feser succinctly describes this understanding thus, "In short, the Third Way (Aquinas' third proof for God's existence) holds that the world of contingent things could not exist at all unless there was a necessary being," (91). This statement will be explained by providing a paraphrase below of the thinking Feser outlines in pages 90-91 of his book.

The understanding of contingent and necessary beings first comes from the observation that in the natural order of things there are things that could either exist or not exist, i.e. contingent. This is deduced from the fact that things either come into existence or pass out of existence. Anything that is contingent must have had at some point not actually existed since this belongs to the very nature of being contingent. Now if everything were contingent then it must be true that at some point nothing would have existed, but this is obviously impossible because if at one time nothing existed then nothing could have come into existence because contingent things can only come into existence by the cause of something already extant. Since it is obvious that things exist then there must be something that has an existence that is not contingent in order for all contingent things to be able to exist, i.e. there must be something that has a necessary existence. Furthermore this fundamentally necessary being must have of itself its own necessity. This fundamentally necessary being is what is called God. (Within the book *Aquinas* terms such as contingent and necessary are used much differently than many contemporary philosophers would use

them and theories such as casualty are controversial in many modern circles. Please reference the book for the author's treatment of these differences and controversies.)

From this understanding of God as the Necessary Being some aspects of the nature of God can be discerned. By observing that which actually exists in the world it can be determined that these things in some way receive their existence from God. Whatever exists, then, can help lead to a partial understanding of the nature of God. For example since rationality exists then it can in some way be said that God possesses rationality.

Before this thesis progresses any further with this understanding of God as Necessary being it is appropriate to deal with one of the major obstacles this understanding presents: if God is the source of all being, and all that exists in some way has its existence from God, then does God cause evil to exist and if evil does in some way have its existence from God then does that mean that the nature of God is in some way evil?

In order to answer this question it is first important to define what is meant by the term evil. In *Words of Wisdom* Carlson defines evil as, "... the absence (i.e., a privation) of a good that ought to be present..." (100). So, according to this classical understanding, evil is not really a thing that has an existence but a defect in an actual thing. So for example there is no evil that *exists* when a human being is murdered, the evil results from the fact that the respect given to the life of that individual does not exist. This may sound like philosophical hair-splitting to many individuals, so for a more in depth discussion on the topic read Brian Davies' *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*.

If evil does not belong to the nature of God because, as discussed above, evil is in a certain sense not an actual “thing” but is the privation of a good that ought to exist, is it possible to say the converse, i.e. that goodness exists and finds its source in the nature of God? Does the good actually exist and if it does what does it say about the nature of God? In *Words of Wisdom* Carlson defines the good, in part, as, “A thing that is desirable or suitable for or perfective of a being...” (118). According to this definition the good is defined relative to the object in discussion. In order to determine what is good for a being it requires an understanding of that thing’s nature and the end to which that thing is directed. (For a defense of Aquinas’ understanding of final causation see: “Does Efficient Causation Presuppose Final Causation? Aquinas vs. Early Modern Mechanism by Paul Hoffman).

For example, what if people are debating whether or not it is good to eat elephant manure? Reflexively many people would be tempted to say, “No, such a thing is not good.” But using the above cited definition of the good one could say that yes eating elephant manure is good in regards to a dung beetle but is not good in regards to a human being. It would appear then that the good is not a thing unto itself but something that can only be defined in relation to a being. If that is the case then is it possible to say that God is good?

Of the multiple arguments that can be made for the goodness of God one is best suited to the thrust of this paper: God as ultimate good because He is the final end of all things. If the good is that which brings things to their perfection and God is the final end of all things then God must be the ultimate good. How then is it understood that God is the final end of all things?

If the previously cited argument about necessary and contingent beings is accepted then it is understood that the universe needs to have been created by God. This traditionally leads to the question of why a perfect and infinite God would create anything, since He lacks nothing in Himself nor needs anything. It is the answer to this question that explains that the end of all things is God thereby making him the ultimate good.

In his book *Natural Theology* John F. McCormick, S.J. discusses why God created the universe and why God is the final end of the universe. Fr. McCormick's argument is predicated on two Scholastic notions which he develops elsewhere in his book: that the will only acts upon that which is perceived to be good, regardless of whether or not the good perceived is in actuality a good thing, and that a rational agent always acts for an end. With these two principles in mind McCormick goes on to argue that God, since He is perfect and lacks nothing, creates the universe not because of anything external to Himself but because of the perfection natural to God (201) and God's desire to multiply His glory, i.e. not to increase His glory but to make it manifest in an external way so that other things such as the angels and human beings may share in His glory (200-01).

If creation is made with the end of magnifying God and His glory then it can be said that the proper end of creation rests in God. If the good is that which helps a being to become perfect according to its nature then God, since He is the end of all things, is the ultimate good. As such it can certainly be said that God is good.

What does all of the forgoing reflection mean? Sure, it may allow for a discussion about God's nature, but what does that have to do with the attempt to examine the compatibility between a rational understanding of God and the portrayal of God and His

commands in the Old Testament? The importance of the forgoing reflections is that by examining the nature of God it allows for a discussion about what can be expected from God, especially if He were to reveal Himself to u. From the above reflections can be deduced a significant hermeneutical principle which can be used in a variety of ways: the fact that since God is the source of all things' existence He cannot be the source of two diametrically opposed things, e.g. good and evil. With the understanding of God as the source of all things a process of evaluation can develop to determine whether or not something is from God based on whether or not such a thing would actually share in God's nature.

If things that have a real existence ultimately draw their existence from some aspect of the nature of God then those things which exist can be used to infer aspects of God's nature, i.e. a rational reflection upon extant things can indicate some aspects of the nature of God. In this category of extant things are truth, unity, beauty, etc. Since these things exist then it can be known that in some way their existence is rooted in the nature of God and therefore reveals something about the nature of God. Due to this it can be said, in some sense, that God is truth, unity, beauty, etc. because it is God Himself who gives cause to the actual existence of such things. If it can be proven that in God's nature there is truth, beauty, goodness, etc. then it can also be known that in God there is no deceit, ugliness, evil, etc. because of the logical principle of non-contradiction.

By being able to identify certain aspects of God's nature then it is possible to begin to determine whether or not God would act a certain way. For example, if I were to have a mystical experience in which I was told to tell the whole world that I am an angel I would

know this experience did not come from God because it is a lie and lies do not share in the nature of God and are therefore not from God.

Based on the argument that God is good, in part, because He is the final end of all things it can also be known that anything from God will not be opposed to the perfection of things. Therefore if I had another mystical experience in which I was told that cyanide is in fact the greatest vitamin supplement available to humankind I would know that such a mystical experience is in fact not from God. Due to the principle of non-contradiction, as mentioned above, it is known that God cannot be good but at the same time be evil. Therefore knowledge of God's goodness serves as an absolute measure against which things can be judged as either being from God or not being from God, i.e. something that is evil cannot ever have come from God because it would be contrary to His nature.

Even if one is to accept the above arguments about God as Absolute Being and God as good does that mean that God could never act contrary to these characteristics? This was briefly discussed above using the principle of non-contradiction, but this question warrants a more full answer. In many Greek mythologies, for example, the deities do not always act in rational or consistent ways. They act just as humans do, fueled by a mix of both good and bad desires. Is it possible that God acts in such a way?

The answer to this question is found in the traditional expression that God's essence and existence are one. What this means is that since God is the absolute, necessary being what He is by nature and His way of being are identical. It is impossible to talk of what God is and how God acts as if they were two separate things. Since God is the ground of reality itself it is impossible for Him to act against His nature. It would be comparable to trying to

make a square into a circle. Such things are mutually exclusive by nature. This understanding that God's essence and existence are the same is also referred to by many writers as the simplicity of God, such as in *On Being and Essence* by St. Thomas Aquinas.

Based on the above it can be seen that so long as rational reflection is done well it is possible to know certain and constant truths about God. It can be known that God is good and that He is always good. From these certain principles that have been reached through rational reflection is born a sure standard against which things can be judged as either belonging or not belonging to God. Things which purport to be of God but are in opposition to what is known about God through reason are most certainly therefore not from God. But this raises one final issue for this section on God and His revelation: if God is infinite and therefore omniscient is there not the possibility that God will reveal something to humans that is beyond the abilities of the human intellect? What if, for example, there is a revelation claiming that God is a Trinity of Persons?

The final criteria I would like to propose in this section on understanding God's nature and His revelation is that something may appear to be irrational while in fact it may be perfectly rational. To help illustrate this point I will employ the distinction between apprehend and comprehend. In this instance apprehend means to understand something without understanding it fully, i.e. for something to be intelligible. An example of this can be found in a first year foreign language student reading an advanced composition. Based on punctuation, limited vocabulary, and other things a first year student may be able to make some sense of an advanced composition without understanding it fully. This is in contrast with what it is to comprehend something, namely the ability to understand something

completely. Whereas the first year language student may have a limited understanding of an advanced composition, the author will understand the composition in its entirety. It will be illustrative to apply these distinctions to the Trinity example cited above.

In Christian belief there is the idea that God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: One God in Three Distinct and fully Divine Persons. On the face of it this dogma seems irrational. But many authors have shown how this dogma is at the very least an intelligible belief. For example Aquinas argues that if humanity is made in God's image and humanity is self-aware then God Himself must also be self-aware. If this is true then it is proper to speak of God (Father), the Self-Image of God (Son) born of the self-awareness, and the mental Understanding (Holy Spirit) between God and His Self-Image. In this way Aquinas tries to show that while the dogma of the Trinity may not be comprehensible it is apprehensible or intelligible. (Place here a discussion on this topic in more depth from St. John of the Cross),

The biggest obstacle in using this distinction between comprehension and apprehension is knowing when such a distinction is being employed legitimately and when such a distinction is a specious cover for actual irrationality. Traditionally this distinction has only been used when discussing supernatural or preternatural phenomenon. So far as inquiry is concerned this appears to be the safest approach for employing this distinction. Dealing with preternatural or supernatural phenomenon is by definition beyond the limits of natural human comprehension and therefore suggests that as truth moves from the realm of the natural to the realm of the supernatural the ability of the natural human intellect to grasp such truths diminishes. As a result of the diminishing certainty of natural human comprehension

standards other than comprehension become more appropriate to discuss some aspects of preternatural and supernatural phenomenon. The standard of apprehension allows for a rational approach of intelligibility while still allowing for an understanding of the limitation of the human intellect.

Conclusion

In this chapter it has been explored what can be known about God through reason, and what such knowledge means about what is to be expected from God in revelation. The purpose of briefly sketching several philosophical principles about God is so that it is possible to say that God is good, that God is loving, etc. and that anything to the contrary is a lie. By coming to know God through reason, one can become certain in the goodness of God. Furthermore, it has been worthwhile to mention that there are limits to human reason, such as was mentioned during the discussion about incomprehensibility. While reason can indeed be very powerful and helpful, human beings are still finite creatures who rely on the revelation of God about Himself. Reason does not replace revelation, it simply complements it.

Conclusion: The Integrity of My Belief

My thesis was, in part, sparked by this passage from 2 Kings 2:23-25:

From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. “Get out of here, baldy!” they said. “Get out of here, baldy!” He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria.

So now that I am at the end of my thesis I think it is worthwhile to see if I now have the tools to make sense of this passage. I think, using the Thomistic category of the “reflection of the wise men,” there are at least several important aspects of this passage that help to interpret it. One, there is nothing in this passage that says “And the Lord God says” or any other similar line. Two, there is no necessarily causal relationship presented in this passage. There is without a doubt a certain chronology to the passage, but there is no explicit mention of casualty. Third, the age of these “boys” is unknown. Fourth, any extenuating circumstances and the overall context are not really provided.

So what do the above mentioned aspects mean? Well, one, I think it can be argued that there is no evidence that God Himself said that this incident happened to punish these boys. It can be argued that the author of the passage recorded the incident as an example of what he believed to be the power of God, but was in actuality a mere coincidence. There is no causal claim that is explicit in the text. A wise man may have seen this incident and wanted to record it as an example of God's power, because the wise man saw it as an example of God's power. This passage may be entirely the product of an individual's reflection on the things that unfold around him.

While I think the Thomistic category of wise men's reflection is helpful, it also presents several obstacles. If God can be known through reason, then what is the point of much of the revelation in the Old Testament? Further, when can it be known that certain aspects of the text are born from reflection and certain potentially problematic aspects are actually from God given through revelation, i.e. how can it be known that an issue at hand is not really problematic but is in fact an example of incomprehensibility? By what standard should the balance between reason and revelation be navigated? Additionally, what understanding of divine inspiration is operative in the Thomistic model? Did the authors of Sacred Scripture simply write down the *verbatim* revelation of God or is there some level of mediation involved?

These are complex questions which Thomas and others who follow after him answer, but these questions and answers are too far beyond the scope of this thesis. These are the questions I will continue to explore as I move forward in my life of faith.

Aside from the interpretation of the passage from 2 Kings, what else can be gleaned from my thesis? Personally, I think I have most benefited from Augustine's discussion of dispensationalism and Calvin's emphasis on the sinfulness of humanity. Both of these are tools with which I can begin to evaluate Thomas' model of interpretation. For example, Augustine's dispensationalism can help to explain why the cultural context of the times predisposed the Israelites to develop certain dietary and marital laws that are no longer widely observed today. Also, Calvin's discussion of the depravity of human nature helps to explain some of the gross violence in the Old Testament, such as the story of the Levite's Concubine in Judges 19.

Reflecting upon all of the work and research that I have done, I think I have arrived at the point that I can answer the original question of my thesis: is the God portrayed in the Old Testament compatible with a loving God known through reason? Relying on the framework developed by Aquinas and using the tools provided by Augustine and Calvin, I think it is without a doubt possible to believe that the God portrayed in the Old Testament is compatible with a loving God Who can be known through reason.

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