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THEOLOGY AS CREATIVE LANGUAGE. THE CASE OF THOMAS BROOKS

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Abstract

The problem of theological language has been a hindrance in coming closer to God, ever since complex patterns of thought have combined with the theological inquiry. The conclusion that helped Protestantism gain ground was bringing the theological message of the Bible to the understanding of every-day believer. An effort was made to explain how God works in history, and how to become more like Christ in one's every-day life. However, mere copying was not the foundation of Christianity. Inner conviction born out of understanding the explanation from the Biblical message was crucial. Thomas Brooks was one of the protestant theologians who aimed to explain how the Devil and evil work against the believer, in order to create chaos, disorder, sorrow, hatred, deception, and ignorance. He did this by transforming the theological message into creative language, using every-day images in order to create a relation between theology and praxis. This paper will analyze some of the aspects found in Brooks' theological presentation, in order to show how theology could be used for the benefit of the individual believer, as well as for the benefit of society.

Introduction

This paper starts from the hypothesis that theology is supposed to fulfill a double role. First, theology must use deep methods of thought in order to explain with technical terms the teachings about God, as they are found in the Bible. Usually for the protestant theologians the foundation of all theological thought is the Bible. Everything else, including nature, is explained in accordance with the information found in the Scripture. The complicated definitions and the technical terms have a precise and practical purpose: to help those who study the depths of theology to take these terms and present them in an intelligible fashion to the every-day believers in the church.

This leads to the second purpose of theology. It must transfer the meanings of the technical terms into easy to understand explanations, useful for the presentation of the Scripture for the every-day believer. This means that the people in the pews, during and after the Sunday class and the sermon, should be able to understand and apply any teachings found within Scripture. These two purposes lead to another one, which deals with the fellowship of the believers. Once the believers understood, at least parts, of the sermon, for example, they will interact with one another, either after the service, or during the week. The teachings will be debated, to a certain level of understanding among them. Some may understand more, some less, but out of this teaching communion, there should be a deeper and better understanding of the purpose of one's faith and life.

This is a process, therefore it may take anything from minutes to years to understand. However, the purpose of this entire mechanism is to create a more "humane" human, a person that through ethical and spiritual convictions will work individually, as well as communally, to create healthier, more secure environments for one's family and for the entire communities. These practical applications of the now better understood theologies would have an impact at a regional, national, continental and worldwide levels. This is not utopia, because Christianity has managed to spread throughout the globe in the last two millennia. It had a longstanding impact at all levels of society, from the economical, through the political, social, and cultural levels. Writers or musicians, politicians or social workers, physicians or teachers, laymen or clerics, regardless of the place or time, Christianity was represented at all levels of the social structure. There was an obvious difference between the true Christians and the false ones, but that has constantly been showed by the contrast between the teachings of Christ and the practices of their lives.

What Is Theology

There are many definitions for theology. An interesting definitions states that it is the intellectual interpretation of Christianity in its development, with prime reference to moral and social life (Lyman, 1913, p. 332). I would like to define theology as the art of creating understanding. Understanding is the result of filtering knowledge through one's personal experience of the Divine. Again, for the Protestants, the personal experience of God is built upon the teachings of the Bible. Not all so called experiences have a divine "touch". Understanding God, life, and existence is a challenge for any theologian, not to mention for the regular, everyday believer. Some interact regularly with the Bible, some occasionally, some, however, leave the Bible aside, thinking that only the initiated ones can understand it. Besides, the foundation of a Christian's faith is not simply the Bible, but the Person of Christ. He is not a mere model to copy, but the foundation of faith (Brown, 1914, p. 18).

Theology can also be defined as the art of explaining God. The previous definition goes hand in hand with this one, because both have the same final purpose: making God intelligible to the common believer, the simple man. Once the believer understands who God is and what God does, the result should be greater faith in God and a deeper conviction regarding one's purpose in life. Theology serves a noble purpose, but it can slide into sterile argumentation, that has no practical outcome. This can later be used by theologians to evaluate what is useful in a debate and, therefore, what can aid the better understanding of God ("Theology," 1830, p. 235).

"Understanding" is an important element for this paper. It goes to show that unless theology is intelligible for the average believer, it loses its purpose. What use can the non-believer, as well as the believer, from a debate that no one understands even after there was an attempt to explain it. In this context of understanding the spiritual world and how it transcends into the physical realm, the theological works of Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) are of good use. He is one of those divines who understood that the people in the pew face various spiritual and worldly temptations all the time.

There is no moment in which the Devil rests. In order to help the simple believer to better understand how to keep away from the tempter and live in accordance to God's will, he wrote several articles on how the Devil temps and ensnares the believer. The most important aspect of Brooks' work is that he created images of every-day activities and events, to which all people can relate. He took the example of Christ, who explained His ministry and the mechanics of the Kingdom of God, by using simple, clear, and every-day events. For example, Christ talked about the various types

of soil into which the seed falls. The seed represents the word of God, the different types of soil represent the temptations and the problems that can destroy or stop the seed from growing and bearing fruit (Matthew 13:1-23). That was an image the people he was talking to were familiar with. They knew how to plant, and how difficult it is for seeds to sprout if the conditions are not good. Therefore, such an image was superimposed on the spiritual message and the *understanding* of the message should have been easy to grasp.

Does theology have a practical aspect? Is it purely speculation? Or perhaps a different face of philosophy? Does it have anything to do with every-day life and every-day problems? The questions have been launched at theology from outside the church, but also from within. It is crucial to find the answer to these questions, because if Christianity does not offer an alternative to non-Christian philosophies, it cannot prove its usefulness. People seek to find answers to various problems (Soares, 1912, p. 427). One of these problems is that of evil. The mechanics of evil are complex. For Christianity evil is personified by Satan or the Devil, the fallen archangel who sought to be like God, an equal, and, if possible, dethrone Him. The first physical appearance of evil in the created world is in the Garden of Eden. Since the fall of man the Devil has been an ever-present character in the history of humanity. Christianity describes the Devil as the father of lies, and its ministry is to work against Christians and the non-believers, in order to drag their souls into hell after death. There have been various images of the personification of evil (Carus, 1896, p. 581), but this paper presents the traditional perspective on evil. The work of the Devil is based on deception. Brooks identifies these works and describes some of the ways the Devil works, in order to aid the believer in the righteous path of holiness.

Brooks employs the same method of explaining the ways the Devil works his snares in order to make humans sin. Reading Brooks' works requires a readiness for an exquisitely well-organized mind. The work this paper analyses is Chapter III *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* found in *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, volume 1. The art of argumentation is well refined in the mind of Brooks. He does not jump into the argumentation, but proves to be quite careful and respectful towards his readers. He first presents an *Epistle Dedicatory*, followed by *A Word to the Reader*, and finally he presents *A Table shewing the principal things in this Treatise*. These are literary tools meant to prove that the entire work is a work of care and almost stoic determination. They are also meant to give the reader a sense of depth, or organized thinking. The reader feels respected and is looking forward to find out what the writer has prepared for him.

Christians have been using, better or worse, such tools in order to persuade those from within and without the Church to choose one side or the other. In this case, Brooks chooses a subject that goes undebated in some churches, but highly debated in others. Brooks goes dark: he presents the way the devil works in the life of human beings, especially Christians. He organizes his argument into four main chapters. The first chapter presents some of the devices that the devil uses to lead people to sin. The second chapter presents the devices through which the devil keeps souls from fulfilling their holy duties. The third chapter presents the devices – this repetition is useful for the reader because it creates a sense of consistency – through which, once ensnared into sin, the devil uses them to keep the soul in a deplorable and sad state. In the fourth chapter Brooks presents the devices and ways in which the devil uses to destroy the ranks of men in the world. There is a progress in the methodology of the devil.

General Presentation

First, the devil creates an environment in which man is led from righteousness into sin, this is the *tempter* stage. Second, the devil becomes even more practical. He progresses from *tempter* to *persuader*. In this state the devil tries to break the ties with holy living. Once that is accomplished, it would be quite easy to keep man in a pitiful and desperate state. Third, the devil progresses from *persuader* to *tormentor*, because once man has sinned the devil works in such a way as to keep him in that state of sin. Despair and doubting are efficient tools to keep man away from God. Fourth, the devil progresses from *tormentor* to *destroyer*. In this state, the devil becomes the agent of anarchy, he being presented as the creator of anarchy. Christianity believes in order and hierarchy, in a well-organized plan according to which the entire Universe works. The author of order is God, and in contradistinction, the enemy of order and God is the devil. If God is order in His essence, the devil is anarchy. It would be quite natural for the devil to be the exact opposite of God, but not an equal.

Brooks adds after these four main chapters an appendix, a number of characters of false teachers, six propositions regarding Satan, reasons for the previous point, and a number of good uses of the previous ideas. Apparently the works of Brooks have met several objections, which he addressed in an orderly manner. He creates his entire argument as a tool for easy understanding. His work is not about knowing the devil better. Rather, it is about how to avoid the snares and stay one's ground in faith towards God, for the blessing of one's life and in order to create a better communion within society.

Each chapter has several sub-divisions. Each one is about a device the devil uses in his

work against the believers. The language he uses is borrowed from medicine. Sickness is an almost constant aspect in man's life. In time various kinds of diseases have found cures or remedies. Some were thought to have no cure, and yet, medicine has developed *remedies* to help the sick heal.

Brooks writes about the devil's *devices*, but they are rather ailments or diseases. On the other hand, they are part of man's life. It is simply logical that if man is spiritually sick, one needs spiritual remedies. Therefore, for each device or disease, Barrow offers not one, but several *remedies*. For some devices he offers as much as twelve remedies. This proves that there is more righteousness and hope available to the afflicted than there is evil within man. If man sins, there is hope. If man has not sinned, then when the occasion to sin will present itself, one will know what to do to avoid it. However, Brooks is a realist. He knows there is no perfection in creation, not after the fall, at least. He directs his argument to this state of being: sin in man. There is none who did not sin at all. Therefore, he argues as if all who read his works are sinners in need for remedies. The point is not to simply give the remedies, but it is a persuasion to accept it.

The First Chapter

The first chapter has twelve sub-divisions, each depicting a device or a disease. One of first devices has to do with fishing. The modern citizen has no real need to fish. The city dweller fishes only for sport. One's life does not depend on fishing. This might pose a problem for understanding. However, the media proves to be helpful. Due to the countless documentaries, fishing is understood as being the only source of income for various populations across the world. The documentaries also present various ways to fish efficiently. For the readers or hearers of Brooks, fishing was a way to sustain one's family. In order to catch a fish, a bait is needed. The bait's purpose is to hide the hook. It presents the fish an apparently easy and free meal. When the fish bites, it obviously swallows the bait, but also the hook. Brooks borrows that image in order to explain that the devil uses a desirable bait in order to catch the soul of man in the hook of sin. The image must have been vivid, since people fished on a regular basis. The message was about how some things might look pleasing and desirable, but are hiding a trap (Brooks, 1866, pp. 12–16).

The second device presents the devil as a skilled painter. Any house needs a good cleaning and a fresh coat of paint in order to preserve the inner and outer beauty of a home. It is beautiful to stay in a clean house, with fresh and carefully painted rooms. When we want to paint a wall, the old paint and all the layers must be scrubbed off. One of the reasons is to see whether the wall is

deteriorated. The fresh coat of paint must be laid only after proper preparation has been made. A master painter will know all the steps. The devil does no noble act, when he starts painting the snare. The paint might be vivid and clean, but the wall is infected and broken. If an inner wall is not properly taken care of, it could cause the falling down of the entire house. This is the very thing that the devil desires. Walls are not the only things that can be painted. Brooks' point is that whatever sin represents, it is painted the colors of virtue. Deception is the game of the devil. Wisdom is an integral part, or should be, of any Christian. It is the element that helps man find the clues that prove the nature of a certain action. In this case, the vivid colors of virtue should not deceive the believer. Yet again, Brooks knows that there are many kinds of believers. Some are more spiritually mature than others. This maturity is present in every-day life. It should be easier for a mature Christian to spot the deception. Brooks explains what the believer should be aware of. The simplicity of such an image delivers a powerful message. It would have been quite easy for the average hearer to identify with such issues (Brooks, 1866, pp. 16–18).

There is not enough space in this paper to present all the devices. However, some can be presented to a greater extent. The fourth device is about a reversal of values, a deception of values. The devil presents the great men and women, but not from the perspective of their virtues, but their sins. If one falls for this device, the consequence is obvious. No matter how many virtues one might have, they will not be seen, or will be ignored. This constitutes the perfect excuse to sin. There will be a perpetuation of sin in man's life, by adhering to a state of toxic criticism and a hunt for the mistakes of other, in order to justify one's fall (Brooks, 1866, pp. 24–27).

The fifth device is the most disturbing one. It is so accessible and it seems to present God in the perfect light. It seems to capture the essence of God: mercy. A merciful God is more desirable than an angry, vengeful One. A correct God, a righteous God, and punishing God seems not to correspond with man's expectation. Man's God must be merciful, because this way one can appease one's conscience. The device of the devil is to present God as if He were made up only of mercy. This relates to man's desire for forgiveness. This forgiveness is not in accordance with the character of God, but with the image of man. The desire of man's conscience dethrones the image of the Scriptural God. The reversal of this image leads to a "pink" God, a sort of loveable God who accepts all and everything, without making any change. Brooks is aware of the fact that the Bible depicts another image, and strives to describe what he believes to be the true God, in accordance to the Bible (Brooks, 1866, pp. 27–31).

Repentance is a key element of any Christian denomination. Variations on the theme do exist, but these are not analyzed here. However, repentance presupposes a spiritual, a rational and even a physical involvement. There is no such thing as easy repentance. The point Brooks makes is that a Christian must be able to understand that there is no possible aspect of sin that can be solved easily. There is a wider picture to the problem of repentance. It is associated with the death of Christ. The devil, according to Brooks, is trying to persuade the believer that repentance is easy. This device is connected to the ninth one. In it the devil is depicted as a changer of values. Instead of presenting the blessings of salvation, the devil presents only the sufferings and the crosses, or the difficulties of those who believe, or have believed. Yet again, the devil's device is about offering an image of a God who defines life through suffering. He does not depict the true blessings. However, there is an urge to see the negative, or the consequences of what the devil himself offers, rather than the work of God. In other words, the sufferings are not provoked by God, but by the Devil (Brooks, 1866, pp. 47–54).

The first chapter of Brooks' work deals with the problem of ensnaring, or tricking the soul of man to do something it is not supposed to do. The devil's wickedness is described in terms of a spiritual being who works constantly to know the life and weaknesses of men. Once identified an entire plan is put into motion in order to trick the soul to sin. The image of the devil and its works are described in plain language, to which ordinary people can relate.

The Second Chapter

The second chapter portrays the devil as persuader. Once man has sinned, the devil works to keep the soul, hence man, in a state of despair. In such a state sin is a normal occurrence. If hope and joy are characteristics of a healthy spiritual life, despair and sadness characterize failure and the loss of balance. In such a state man will certainly sin again, thus perpetuating a downward spiral that can lead to one's loss of life, either through suicide, or as a result of various actions.

Keeping man in despair does not happen easily. In order to accomplish such a feat, the devil must separate the soul from any source of joy and hope, namely from spiritual activities, holy duties, and religious services. These devices are also based on deception. This time the devil keeps man's soul away from spiritual duties by presenting the world in its glory and beauty. However, Brooks argues that these are mere "bewitching sights". Beauty and bravery can be deceiving. As an act of choice, man changes affections, from the sufferings of the church to the glories of the world (Brooks, 1866, pp. 63–70).

Perseverance of the saints does not mean an easy task. It's a struggle. The believers who work through this life at the spiritual level know from experience that it is no easy task. However, blessings are to be counted. The devil tries to keep the soul in check, according to Brooks, by presenting only the dull and difficult side of the spiritual works. These are meant to discourage anyone who has already sinned and is looking for absolution. Expecting an easy life as a Christian is a wrong perspective. Despite its difficulty, it is not resumed merely to these. However, the Devil shows only these, in order to discourage the believer from seeking righteousness (Brooks, 1866, pp. 70–74).

One of the best tricks the Devil uses is presenting the desire to do the spiritual things in one's own ways. It has been an old device of the devil. He presented the very same idea when in the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve. That old trick comes back again, throughout history. In Brooks' time, man did not change at all. The same devices for the same people. If the trick is so old, the problem it creates is quite important. It has not lost any of its danger. That is why Brooks warns against the fashionable things of the world, one of which is the desire to succeed on one's own. That would not be a serious problem, had it not been in the matters of the spiritual realm. Since it all depends on God, man cannot succeed except by trusting and recognizing God's involvement. Brooks creates the image of one's pride by pointing out that they will prove problematic for one's neighbor. When temptations strike, the consequence is not only in one's life, but also in the lives of the others. Pride plays a crucial role in destroying relations, and Brooks does not fail to name it as such (Brooks, 1866, pp. 81–84).

The Third Chapter

The third chapter presents the devil as a tormentor. This means that once it has severed the connections to the spiritual factors, it torments the soul of man, by keeping it in a sad and desperate condition. One of the best ways to succeed in keeping someone in a deplorable state is to create a separation from the object or subject that could offer an escape, in our case spiritual salvation. The devil torments the soul by making man focus more on the problems than on Christ, the source of one's salvation. Traditional theology places a strong emphasis on the ministry of Christ, one aspect of it being the offering of salvation. The point is that man should leave fear behind and trust Christ for forgiveness. If that does not happen, it would be quite easy to keep man in despair (Brooks, 1866, pp. 91–94).

The devil is also a trickster. He plays bad jokes on people, by messing with their axiological values. Grace and blessings go together. When God saves men, He offers both. However, when a desperate

man counts and defines his graces in a wrong way, not only his life, but the lives of others are in danger, relations break, while families and lifelong friends suffer. The main issue with this aspect is that the man who makes all the wrong choices feels entitled to do so, and one might even feel righteous (Brooks, 1866, pp. 95–97).

Not only do men count their graces in a wrong way, argues Brooks, but they could end up considering them as being counterfeit. Due to sadness and despair, one comes to the point when judgment itself is impaired. This leads to a wrong assessment of God's interventions. The result is a quest for "more", but that is an illusion, because man already has the "most". Such a quest will never quench one's desire for peace and joy. The road ends in more despair, sorrow, and sadness. Part of being wise is to differentiate between value and waste, between good and evil, between worth and worthlessness. If there is no capacity for stopping when one finds truly valuable things, the quest turns into torment and deception (Brooks, 1866, pp. 99–104).

The Fourth Chapter

The fourth chapter depicts the devil as the destroyer of order and hierarchy or ranks. By inverting the established order set forth by God, the devil creates chaos in the church and in society. Undoubtedly there are those we might call "great men". They are dedicated to noble causes and high values. However, not all of us can become like them. We have different callings and different places in society. These, argues Brooks, are made in such a way that society might work for the better of our social environment (Brooks, 1866, pp. 117–122).

The wise and the learned are a resource within the Christianity. According to Brooks God does not disgrace or lower those who are learned and wise. He would rather use and lead them into creating straight paths for the Church, as well as for society. However, they have a most annoying weak spot, among many other weak spots. This is pride, connected to self-sufficiency. Their knowledge is their downfall. In fact, it is human nature that creates the perfect environment for pride to take shape. Wisdom and knowledge are perverted and turned into means in themselves. Pride will make such people use knowledge to look down upon others and misconsider their value within the Church and society. The obvious reaction is discontent with the educated class, and a rejection of education altogether. The end result is a community that will reject anyone with a degree. Ignorance will be the downfall of such a community (Brooks, 1866, pp. 125–128).

The final device in the destroyer's armory is ignorance. The devil will lead people into loving ignorance and despising knowledge. This is one of

the easiest ways to desconsider God, creation, oneself, and one's fellow man. Hatred, bigotry, envy, and the entire list of evils presented in the Bible are the consequences of the works of the devil. Regardless how he might work, the traditional Christian perspective connects the devil to all sorts of problems. It is not only human nature to blame, but also the active involvement of the devil (Brooks, 1866, pp. 136–138).

Conclusion

The environment in which Brooks lived allowed for a detailed presentation and analysis of this spiritual aspect. Thus, his work is relevant depiction of human limitations and human wickedness. His works are still striking a sensitive chord in our contemporary minds, because all the human manifestations described by him are actual images that can be easily observed all around.

As mentioned before, there is too little space for a detailed analysis of the devil's devices and the remedies considered by Brooks. However, for the time being, it suffices to say that each of the devices presented by Brooks in his work have at least two remedies. The most numerous remedies amount to twelve. The good surpasses the evil, or there are more solutions and blessings than there is evil in the world.

By finding the parallels with every-day life, Brooks creates images that help people relate to the severity of the spiritual battle, as well as the severity of one's importance in the spiritual realm. The creative spirit is manifested in his works by wielding arguments that are intelligible. The point of his works is not to show off his theological knowledge, but to use it for the better of his fellow man. Once man understands how the spiritual realm impacts the physical one, there should be a change in ethics, behaviors, relations, not for personal gain, but out of care and love for one's neighbor. Theology creates language, but they are two kinds: high theology, which uses technical terms, and low theology, which translates these terms for the better understanding of ordinary believers.

Brooks finds it useful to argue in favor of practical theology, because the life of the Christian is about choices and interactions at three levels: with God, with oneself, and with others. All interactions stem from ideas and convictions, which point towards a system of thought. The system must make sense, it must have a certain logic. The more logic, the more effort was invested, and this all amounts to a certain type of argumentation and thought process. People interact and if the main purpose of theology is to explain God to the world, then it stands to reason that He must be explained. Technical terms are useful for the initiated, but are of little importance, if not completely useless for the common man. However, these terms and

definitions make perfect sense, if explained properly. As a servant of God in the Church and society, Brooks deemed it fit to make the best use of his abilities in order to present God in the clearest way possible. He chose to explain not how God works, but how the devil works. However, regardless of how well the devil works, Brooks argues that there are more solutions, than problems. The works of Brooks are useful because they offer a glimpse of how much effort was put into explaining the mechanics of the spiritual realm and its interaction with the physical world, more than 300 years ago. Paradoxically these advice are still useful today, because they show to evils that are still present in the world. It also puts forward the solutions for dealing with them and becoming better in truth, love and dedication towards the divine, one's own person, and one's neighbor. His works are also valuable because of the images created by analyzing the spiritual realm and trying to adapt it to the interaction with the physical realm. Brooks uses theology in order to create images and relevant explanations that are easy to use. The purpose of his works is utterly practical. The reason is that the readers or hearers of his message would have to change their perspectives and actions, strive for peace, and follow the high moral values that would ensure a better society and a better future.

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