Welcome by Way of a Proem

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Among the many frescoes painted in the Sistine Chapel is the iconic image of God, narrowing the chasm that separates Him from His creation, reaching out to Adam. However, this movement can also be interpreted as Adam reaching out across the divide to touch the finger of God. Regardless of which interpretation one chooses, the image portrays a space that separates created beings from their Creator. The Theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet depicts *space*, as a constitutive element of faith. He says that it “concretely mediates the distance between God and us.”¹ It respects God’s difference - His utterly, incomprehensible otherness. This *space* is uncomfortable because it constantly maintains emptiness.² But the natural tendency for humans is to try to fill that emptiness by reaching across this great expanse to touch the finger of God.

There lies another humbling truth within that image – Adam’s finger never touches the finger of God. In other words, human beings do not have direct access to God. Though the natural tendency for human beings is the need to see, to touch, and to find their Creator – human beings can only fill that *space* through mediation. One way to do that is through scripture - the study of the sacred Word of God. Another way is through the sacraments - encountering the mystery of God in sacred symbol and ritual. A final way is through *praxis* - living in virtue and adhering to a principle of ethics within the confines of the mundane and ordinariness of life.
But Chauvet warns us not to overemphasize any of the three. An overvaluation of the scriptures can entail such a veneration that it can lead to fundamentalism. This would make us “critical” Christians, judging others by their theological knowledge or ability to express their relationship to God in a critical manner. An overvaluation of the sacraments reduces them to magic or superstition. This can lead one to think that one can control when and where one encounters God - to the point that they occupy the whole sphere of a Christian’s life. Finally, an overvaluation of ethics reduces Jesus to a political figure – reducing faith to activism and social justice, and judging others by their involvement in these issues.

This overvaluation of scripture, sacrament, and ethics requires a corrective - faith. Chauvet says that “faith lives only from the space between [these] three poles.” It is from these poles of faith and their interludes that our journal emerges. Obsculta is a theological search through liturgy, morality, history, doctrine, and scripture that reaches out to God. This year we are proud to present an archive piece from the pivotal year 1971, as well as contemporary expressions that continue to reach across the chasm with the hopes of touching the finger of God. Our graduate students are willing to share their explorations of challenging questions, knowing that the answers may be just out of reach, in the space that delineates us from our Creator. Just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus were on a journey with Jesus (Luke 24:13-32), so too are we on our own journeys of discovery. Sometimes we may miss His presence, even as He enlightens us, but He is accompanying us nevertheless.

May you find a place in our space of exploration.

Much shalom,

The Obsculta editorial team
Notes:


2. Ibid., 41.

3. Ibid., 40.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

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