**The Theology of History and the Election of Israel.**

What is the Theology of History?

*Theology is* the study of God as indicated by the word's etymology. *History* is the study of the acts of man throughout time. To engage in these disciplines, we must accept the proofs that God exists and that He has revealed Himself in Sacred Scripture. We must also accept that history is intelligible (inter legere—able to be read into). History is not just isolated, unrelated, and unintelligible facts but acts by free men wounded by original sin and inspired by grace. As the true scientist sees the world God created as intelligible and seeks that intelligibility, the true historian will seek this same intelligibility in studying human history. We must ask the “why” question, not just consider what happened. We must ask “why” not only from man's point of view but “why” from God’s point of view, as known by revelation.

God not only exists and created everything from nothing but is holding everything in existence at each moment. He is a personal God who creates for a purpose and, by his Providence, guides all things to this purpose. Since God speaks the whole world into existence, His knowledge of it is not passive but active. Since He is perfect, he must be directing all things back to Himself as the final end of all things. God allows moral and physical evil for the sake of the greater good. Moral evil is possible since God willed to create a moral universe and thus created man with free will, which God respects. Likewise, God hates sin and cannot stand idly by while men reject the order He established. God also rightfully demands that man worship God through acts of external public religion. Man rejected God’s order in Original Sin, which passed on to all men. This doctrine of Faith revealed by God was even understood by the pagans The pagan Greeks understood that man was born sick but asked well.[[1]](#footnote-1) In his book Orthodoxy, Chesterton stated that Original Sin is scientifically certain and we just need to look in the street.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*Philosophy of History.*

Before considering the Theology of History, it will be profitable to consider the Philosophy of History as philosophy is the handmaid of theology. Gordon Graham, professor of philosophy at the University of Aberdeen, defines the philosophy of history as “the application of philosophical conceptions and analysis to history….”[[3]](#footnote-3) In other words, we can identify a philosophy of history by its conscious use of philosophical categories to describe and identify transcendent motive forces that drive the historical process itself.[[4]](#footnote-4) We give two examples of different philosophies of history.

1)A Marxist philosophy of history can be defined as one that sees a definite economic determinism shaping the movement of history to the triumph of the Socialist Man.[[5]](#footnote-5)

2) A evolutionary philosophy of history will look at all progress as a result of a continual war between species and the survival of the fittest.

Everyone has a philosophy of History, which we can be called a lens through which we make sense of historical events. Some use a lens that corresponds to reality, and others do not. The two we mentioned are not valid lenses to look at history. In fact, due to Man’s supernatural destiny, you cannot have a completely accurate philosophy of History without a correct theology of history. St. Augustine points this out. Since our end is ultimately supernatural, we must use revelation to analyze history accurately. For Augustine, Holy Writ provided clues to a proper interpretation of history. The divine purpose for humanity could not be ascertained in any other way since the sacred text tells us how and in what circumstances God intervenes so that the outcome would work out according to his purposes.

*The Theology of History.*

We can use Dr. Robert Llizo’s definition: “Theology of History will attempt to think theologically about history, identifying spiritual forces that shape it.” [[6]](#footnote-6)

How do things come from God, why are things allowed by God, and how are things returning to God? In the Theology of History, we seek to make sense of historical events in the Bible in light of what we know about God and His Providence and man's condition as free and fallen. We use our knowledge of God through reason and revelation and look at the historical books of the Bible—whose historical credibility we established in the last episode— to see the hand of God at work.

This is not a new endeavor. In his seminal work, The City of God, St. Augustine looks at the history of man from Adam to his time and sees a cyclical pattern in linear history. The two loves that created two cities cause these two cycles in linear history. God created all things in pure love and He wills that man love Him in return. Man rejected this love in favor of disordered self-love by Original Sin, and man continues to reject it through personal sins. While respecting man’s free will, God is constantly on rescue missions to bring man back to His love. Order, chaos, and back to order. This is the essence of the cyclical view.[[7]](#footnote-7) When St. Augustine wrote the City of God, he saw history in a three-fold movement: the age preceding the Law (Adam to Abraham), the age under the Law (Moses to Christ), and the age under Grace (Christ to the end of the world). The incarnation and redemption are the center point around which all history turns.

The Ecclesiastical author Origen also consisted of the Theology of History and held that “We need to read the whole bible in the light of the last book of the Bible.” And give some quotes from the book of Apocalypse “Who will open the scroll?[[8]](#footnote-8)” “Then I saw, in the midst, where the throne was, amid the four figures and the elders, a Lamb standing upright, yet slain in sacrifice.”[[9]](#footnote-9) So with Origen, we must read in the Old Testament in light of Christ our Redeemer. A spiritual sense is rooted in the literal sense of the historical events in the Old Testament and sees beyond it. The violence shows the spiritual struggle allegorically and how we must fight evil. The killing of all the enemies symbolized that we must battle all evil in our life. Some evil is so evil it must be hacked to pieces there must be no quarter for sin in our life.

*How can many books of different genres have a coherent pattern we can understand?*

This intelligible salvation narrative can be seen in Scripture because God is the primary author of Sacred Scripture, which tells the history of Salvation through secondary authors.[[10]](#footnote-10) God is not only the author of the words of the Sacred Scriptures, but even the events are under His Providence. He often used events and actions to teach lessons to others and us—upon whom the ends of the earth have come. Some events of the Old Testament are allegorical and point to the New Testament or other moral lessons: teaching us how to behave, what to do, and what to avoid.[[11]](#footnote-11) Even though there are many human authors, given the uniqueness of the principal author of the Scriptures, we must see a thematic coherence and a recognizable narrative arc, even amidst all of this variety.

*Formation of Israel.*

Yes, by Genesis chapter 6, we see the moral collapse not only of a few men but a great part of society. “And now God found that earth was full of men’s iniquities and that the whole frame of their thought was set continually on evil, and he repented of having made men on the earth at all. So, smitten with grief to the depths of his heart.”[[12]](#footnote-12) God seeks to restore order to the world while respecting Man’s Free Will. As in the creation narrative, God always brings order out of Chaos.

In his “City of God,” St. Augustine reads the history of salvation from biblical times through the era of the Church as the tale of Noah’s ark—the little ship, filled with a holy remnant, bouncing on the waves of the stormy sea.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The response of God to this moral collapse is of the utmost importance to understanding the Theology of History. God singles one just man to restore order in the world of moral chaos. He singles out Noah and invites all men to enter the ark as an image of the church. Yet, very few accept to enter the ark of salvation, and the theme repeats throughout salvation history—the invitation of God and man's refusal. Noah seeks to rebuild the City of God in this world, and this city is built on adoration which Sacrifice expresses.

This action of God continues with the singling out of Abraham, who was just. He calls Abraham to leave all comfort and security and go to a land God would show him. Abram listened to God, which was key and common to all who built up the city of God. Abraham believed in God and was made just by his Faith, and as a consequence of his Faith, he did the works God asked him to do, and God made him a great nation. Through Abraham, God invites mankind to enter the City of God by Faith in Christ and asks the chosen people to manifest this Faith through circumcision.

It is with Abraham that we see God shaping a people who will protect Faith in the Messiah. This slow process began with Abel and continued with Noah but is now taking clear shape with Abraham, our father in Faith. “The early Jews did not come ready-made with lofty spiritual conceptions and a firm knowledge of the afterlife. They had to be painfully extracted from all the various peoples sunk in either polytheism or unwitting diabolism, or both. Clearly, God judged that the best way to implement His plan, which leads over time to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, was to form a Chosen People through a long series of actual historical events with very tangible consequences.”[[14]](#footnote-14) It is fairly clear that the first step in God’s plan, amid all this confusion of polytheism and tribal gods, was to hammer into an often deluded people some idea of what it meant for God to say, “I am the Lord.” Under the Old Covenant, a progressively deeper spiritual understanding was forged through long years of reflection on what the Jewish people had rather forcefully experienced.[[15]](#footnote-15)

What were the pivotal points in forming this Israel?

The forming of the chosen people pivoted on land and offspring: “To your *offspring,* I will give *this land.*”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Throughout the history of Israel, this particular plot of earth, east of the Mediterranean, west of the Jordan… would be of crucial importance…..This, of course, is because it was much more than a piece of real estate; it functioned as a symbol of divine favor, the land flowing with milk and honey, the base of operations for the announcement of God to all the nations, and ultimately, an anticipation of the ultimate homeland of heaven.[[17]](#footnote-17)

“More important than the land was the offspring brought about miraculously in Sarah, who was beyond the years of childbearing. Abraham knew that this conception was miraculous and trusted in God. Unlikely births are common in salvation history to show the need to trust in Province and grace over nature.[[18]](#footnote-18)

God will test the Faith of Abraham, the father of all who will profess true Faith in Christ. This trust in Divine Providence is tested profoundly when God asks Abraham to sacrifice his only begotten son, the son of the promise, as a burnt offering. This historical event and many acts of God are stumbling blocks to many and must be considered in their whole dimension.

 “So he called to him, Abraham, Abraham; and when he said, I am here, at thy command. God told him, Take thy only son, thy beloved son Isaac, with thee, to the land of Moira and there offer him to me in burnt sacrifice on a mountain which I will shew thee…[[19]](#footnote-19)

We must remember with Origen that all must be seen in the light of the Lamb, who would be slain for our sins. We see many parallels between this incident and Christ, the beloved Son of God, offering Himself as a sacrifice to God. God is preparing us to understand Christ and His sacrifice through this spiritual Sacrifice, which is referenced in the Holy Mass St. Paul explains this in detail, and we will give a few words here. “By faith [he that is called Abraham](http://catholicbible.online/2/4/230/10383/238316) obeyed….. By Faith, Abraham offered Isaac when he was tried: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Abraham believed God would raise his son if he obeyed this command.

God chose Abraham and Israel to protect Faith in Christ. If Abraham is the Father of our Faith, his Faith must be purified like gold in the fire, and that is what we see all through the life of Abraham and most perfectly in the willingness to sacrifice his son. We must look at the parts of the Bible as they relate each other to the whole Theology of History. God is pursuing fallen creatures and calling them back to Him.

Abraham's Sacrifice in more detail since such a stumbling block.Abraham knew that Isaac was ultimately a creature of God, and Abraham must love God more than his son and love his son for God’s sake. Sacrifice was given to man by God precisely to keep man in the state of two-fold dependence on God: Creature and Redeemer. Since God is a Self-subsisting being, nothing can be added to Him. Since He is the source of our being, we owe Him everything. Sacrifice helps keep us in this attitude of dependence. God is not benefited from our acts. “Rather, it breaks, as it were, against the rock of the divine simplicity and self-sufficiency and comes back to the benefit of the one who made the sacrifice. And this is what is symbolized in the interruptive move of the angel, who gives back to Abraham what he had endeavored to sacrifice. God is not cruelly manipulating Abraham or compelling his hapless creature to commit a crime. When seen within this properly theological perspective, all objections along forensic or psychological lines simply fall away. What we have in this admittedly strange scene is a sort of icon representing certain key dynamics in the spiritual order, which have to be interpreted with spiritual eyes.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The next step in the formation of Israel.

This work of God in forming a people continues with Isaac and Jacob, but this work is very remarkable with Joseph, who was sold into slavery. God turns this evil of selling their brother into slavery—an evil which reminds us of Cain killing Able and is a type of Christ being sold by his people to the pagans— to great good for the chosen people. Joseph first descends into the empty well, then into Egypt, into the prison pit, and finally, God will exalt him to save the world. In all of this, he keeps profound Faith in God and teaches us that we must allow ourselves to be humbled to truly serve God. God then exalts him to rule Egypt and save his people and all people from starvation. As all will one day go to Christ for all spiritual food, all must go to Joseph for food. The few Israelites who went to Egypt grew into great people but also become slaves, which is an image of all mankind under the power of the devil and needing a redeemer. God again chooses one man to be a type of “redeemer.” He does this in the person of Moses, who, as an infant, was put in a basket in the Nile River. It is worth noting that the Hebrew word for the basket used to save Moses was the same used for the ark to save Noah and his family. The word is *tevah.[[22]](#footnote-22)* The reason for this is that the Theological sense is the same. God is on a rescue mission and choosing a man to act for Him in this great work of redemption.

Exodus.

Yes, God saves His people from political slavery, and He does it in a way to show that His real goal is to lead all from slavery to sin. The reason why God wants the people freed is to go and offer Sacrifice. This brings us back to Able, Noah, and the patriarchs and points to Christ. In the word of St. Paul: “Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste, as you are unleavened. For Christ, our pasch is sacrificed.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

This parallels the Gospel when Christ heals bodies to show His power and desire to heal souls. Another principle preoccupation of the author of Exodus is the delineation of those practices and beliefs by which the people of Israel define itself, or better, is defined by God who liberates them. Law, covenant, right worship, ritual sacrifice, sacred meal, etc.[[24]](#footnote-24)

In Genesis, we saw that God created all things, and in the plagues, we see clearly that he is master of all things. God shows He is all-powerful and Lord of every element of creation. Christ will show this power in the gospels—even the wind and waters obey him. The last plague is the killing of the firstborn, which affirms that not only material things but even all life belongs to God. God uses it as a last resort and will bring good out of this evil.

Through the Sacred rite of the Passover sacrifice and meal, all those whose doors were marked by the blood of the lambs are saved from slavery in Egypt, just as all those in the New Testament touched by the Sacred Rites can be saved. The Catholic Church is a real completion of the continuation of these realities with an institutional priesthood and sacred rites that must be kept. Modern Judaism is must like Protestantism lacking a priesthood and sacred rites.

In the forty years of wandering, we see many lessons. We see that life is filled with many difficulties, and we, as the Jews in the desert, are tempted to return to slavery. We will always be tempted to return to the slavery of sin from which Christ’s blood has saved us. We see the cycle of which St. Augustine spoke repeat itself in the desert as it does in our own lives. Sins lead to chaos, and God, in many ways, brings order out of chaos—to bring good out of evil.

*Some of the evils God allows or commands seem very extreme.*

One can easily hyper-focus on these evils God allows when he neglects the fundamental message of the Old Testament:  that God has chosen his people Israel, the children of Abraham, to be a light unto the world by Faith in a redeemer to come. This Faith in Christ, the redeemer, must be protected at all costs since the salvation of all men depends on it. St. Augustine also struggled with the Old Testament because it lacked rhetorical beauty and lofty philosophy. “This was resolved in Saint Ambrose’s preaching through his typological interpretation of the Old Testament: Augustine realized that the whole of the Old Testament was a journey toward Jesus Christ.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

We believe that our life on earth is a preparation for eternity. Ultimately, it is heaven or hell, and God is pursuing man so that man freely accepts His love and goes to heaven. God wants all man to the saved, and these evils that He allows and these bloody deaths are secondary in achieving what God wills — that He be known, first to His Chosen People, and then through Christ and the Apostles to the world.

A few objections from those who do not see things as we do.

The New Atheists refuse to see the intelligibility in History. To quote Richard Dawkins, “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential… a bully. ”[[26]](#footnote-26)

Dawkins and the new atheist refuse to accept that there is God whose existence can be demonstrated by Faith and reason and whose thoughts are infinitely higher than ours. Dawkins, in the book The God Delusion, dismisses the evidence presented in the last podcast concerning the reliability of Scripture and pretends there is real evidence to support the historicity of the Bible.[[27]](#footnote-27) There is a real lack of rigor or honesty in the Chapter “The Argument from Scripture.” I encourage those who think he is a rigorist scholar and intellectually honest to read that chapter after reading Brant Pitre’s books on the defense of Scripture which I recommend in the last episode.

In addition, we note these new atheists are not bringing new arguments but rather old arguments of 2nd-century heretic [Marcion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcionism), a Gnostic who proclaimed that the god of the Old Testament was an evil and lesser counterpart of God…[[28]](#footnote-28) The Church condemned the Marcionites. St. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus defended that the biblical authors could not be clearer that the God who makes even the lowly things that creep and crawl upon the earth is the true God. God is not only the creator of all being—even the smallest—He is Lord of every detail of history, whether by His positive will or permissive will, always respecting Man’s free will.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Chief misconceptions that lead people to think of the God of the Old Testament as evil.

Looking at God as a horrible tyrant in the Old Testament presupposes two misconceptions. [[30]](#footnote-30)

Misconception 1: The first is that God is a God of wrath in the Old Testament and a God of mercy in the New Testament. This mistake can be triggered by some of God’s apparently harsh actions under the Old Covenant; such a focus fails to see that the Old Testament is also chock full of lyrical passages reflecting God’s unsurpassable love. The most striking example, of course, is the Song of Songs. But the prophets and the Psalms are also marked by many such passages. It also fails to see that God punishes us to correct and save us and allows evil for the sake of good. It also ignores the typological lesson God wants to teach by allowing evil. As we mentioned earlier, the physical destruction of the enemies of God to protect the Faith of Israel teaches us to hate evil.

This misconception also suggests that Our Lord does not exercise justice under the New Covenant. Yet denouncing hard-hearted Jewish leaders, lamenting those who lead others into sin, rebuking the wealthy, condemning hypocrites and foretelling disaster for unbelieving communities were all part of Our Lord’s effort to wake us up.[[31]](#footnote-31) Christ also claimed that He will come in the clouds of heaven to Judge the living and the dead.

Misconception 2: The nature of God’s will. A second misconception is that the Old Testament authors write of God’s will in exactly the same way as we do today. On the contrary, we strongly distinguish between God’s permissive and positive will. If something happens that is morally evil, we understand that this is because God’s Providence encompasses His permissive will, which includes not only what He would want someone to do in each situation but what He will permit someone to do in the ultimate workings of His Plan.

In much of the Old Testament, the writers attribute everything to God’s will without distinction. If Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, it was because God hardened it. This captures the reality that everything is encompassed in Divine Providence and focuses on the infinite power of God more than the Free Will of men. Archbishop Sheen notes that this type of language is more typical in Eastern Cultures. The fact that biblical authors speak this way does not mean they deny the distinction between God positive and permissive will.

Any other important things to remember in reading the Old Testament and history in general.

Providence rules everything even now. Ultimately, we cannot fathom the mystery of Divine Providence. The Old Testament directly addresses this mystery, especially in the Book of Job. Though we know far more through Christ and the Church than Job knew, including the immense spiritual benefits of suffering, we still complain. Then as now, after anyone has made his complaint to the Lord, the Lord answers:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?... Have you commanded the morning since your days began and caused the dawn to know its place? Who shut up the sea with doors when it broke forth as issuing out of the womb: Hast thou entered into the depths of the sea and walked in the lowest parts of the deep? Who is the father of rain? Or who begot the drops of dew? Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God?[[32]](#footnote-32)

And, beholding such mysteries, our only answer must be Job’s: “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once and will not answer;…. I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted…. Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know…. I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

Like St. Augustine, we must learn to approach Sacred Scripture humbly. We know from reason that God is all-powerful and all-good. He is a perfect act of intellection, and Scripture confirms the contrast between God’s thoughts and our thought “For my thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord. As the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts.”[[34]](#footnote-34) If we seek to see all things from God’s point of view, we will live in the lights in we try to reduce everything to our point of view, we will live in darkness, and here we can look at two contraction world views:

Steven Hawking claims, "Heaven is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.” When asked to respond, John Lennox replied: "Atheism is a fairy story for people afraid of the light.” Each one of us must personally choose to see history in the light of God’s plan or live in darkness.

Our lights and insight depend on our humility. We must trust that God is all-good and all-powerful even when we cannot understand. His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways, and “everything works together for good with those who love him.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

1. The Greek way by Edith Hamilton [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Orthodoxy: G.K. Chesterton [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Routledge Concise Encyclopedia of Philosophy, p. 356) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Robert Llizo, PhD [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://hc.edu/contact/robert-llizo/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Robert Llizo, PhD [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://scriptoriumdaily.com/towards-the-eternal-city-st-augustines-theology-of-history/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Apocalypse V: 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Apocalypse V: 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Summa Theologiae I.I. 10. Auctor Sacrae Scripturae est Deus. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://drbo.org/summa/question/00109.htm> Summa Theologiae Q I a. 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Gen VI 5,6 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The City of God 15.26 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Jeffrey Mirus PHD [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Jeffrey Mirus PHD [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Gen. 12:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The Great Story of Israel p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Gen: XVIII [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Gen: XXII [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Hebrew XI [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The Great Story of Israel. Bishop Baron [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Robert Alter, The Hebrew Bible: A translation with Commentary, vol 1 The five books of Moses [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. I Cor V: 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The Great Story of Israel p. 88 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Pope Benedict XVI: Church Fathers [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Richard Dawkins. The God Delusion p. 117 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcionism [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/marcionites [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Jeffrey Mirus, Ph.D. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Jeffrey Mirus, Ph.D. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Job 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Job 40:3-42:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Isaias 55: 8 and 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Rm 8:28. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)