

# Creation as Existential Contingency

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*This article criticizes St. Thomas' reliance upon "contingency" as the basis for his postulate of the prior possibility of a natural creation, whether creation be understood actively as a divine action independent of the Father's Missions of the Son and the Spirit or passively, as an ungraced natural order of finite being whose intrinsic intelligibility is governed by the Aristotelian act-potency metaphysical analysis, and is thus reducible to the necessary causes, i.e., the transcendental relations, of matter-form and substance-accident, which together provide the essential intelligibility of material substance. Under this determinist metaphysical analysis, these causes cannot but include its necessary existence as a proper accident integral to its essential form: i.e., existence is already inherent in the Aristotelian essence. Because the Aristotelian essence possesses no potentiality for existential actuation ab extra, i.e., by a Creator, St. Thomas' use of "contingency" to describe the non-necessary existence of an Aristotelian essence can only be abstract, consequently, it represents an appeal to unreason. At best, his attribution of contingent existence to the essentially uncreatable world of Aristotelian essences amounts to an illegitimate passage from the ideal order of purely logical possibility (mere abstract contingency) to that of metaphysical possibility (essential potentiality), and can provide for no more than a nominal creator or creation.*

I: The contingent creation *ex nihilo sui et subjecti*.

## The meaning of contingency

The use of "contingency" entered the Latin theological tradition by way of Boethius (ca. 480-ca. 524), sometimes called the "First Scholastic" by reason of his mediation of Aristotle, particularly of the logical works comprising the *Organon*, to the high Middle Ages. His translations of and commentaries upon these works of Aristotle, and Porphyry's *Isagogue*, inserted "contingens" into the Latin theological vocabulary as a translation of the Greek term *ἐνδεχόμενον*, as used by Aristotle. Boethius' influence and authority continued to increase, to the point of being unquestioned in the twelfth century. In the thirteenth, St. Thomas received "contingentia" as an integral element of the Latin theological tradition, and understood it in the sense Boethius had established, to denote a possible thing or, yet more abstractly, a possibility.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle set out the rules governing the logical attribution of contingency, necessity, possibility and impossibility in *DE INTERPRETATIONE*, ch. 12 (THE BASIC WORKS OF ARISTOTLE. {Oxford University translation, 1931}. Edited and with an Introduction by Richard McKeon [New York: Random House, 1941], at 40-56). While Aristotle did not there define his terms but was rather concerned for the abstract logic governing their usage, that logic requires that "contingent"

St. Thomas deployed the term to account for the non-necessity of the creation of the universe, whereby creatures are understood to be the non-necessary actualization of a prior potentiality, as opposed to the necessary actualization of a universe of essences in the Aristotelian system. St. Thomas assigned existential or substantial possibility to the Aristotelian notion of essence, whose creatability St. Thomas supposed to be simply its intelligibility in terms of the matter-form and substance-accident analyses of the Aristotelian metaphysics, but whose actual existence he knew, as a Christian, not to be inherent in the intrinsic or essential intelligibility of the creature, as Aristotle had considered it to be.

By use of this term, St. Thomas was able to affirm the doctrine of creation; it had of course been unknown to the Aristotelian and Platonic traditions. Particularly, by this device he could thus maintain, against Aristotle, that the created universe, of itself, or *qua* essence, has a possible rather than a necessary existence, and that it therefore does not require existence as the direct implication of its essence, as Aristotle had maintained, but rather is intrinsically capable of existence, in the sense that, should it exist, its existence must be contingent, and not an implication of, or a necessity inherent in, the intrinsic or essential intelligibility of the created order. In short, by insisting upon the “contingency” of creation, St. Thomas intended to safeguard the doctrine of creation (which he thought to be naturally knowable). His attribution of contingency to creation

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have the abstract negative meaning of “not necessary.” Boethius translated *DE INTERPRETATIONE*, along with the preliminary work, *CATEGORIAE*; by this labor, and by his further commentaries on other works of Aristotle, and upon Porphyry’s *ISAGOGE*, he became the major conduit through which the classic Greek philosophical terminology passed into the late classic world of Latin Christian speculation, and thence into that of the early Middle Ages. Chénu has written of Boethius’ achievement, that:

Pareille entreprise, toujours délicate, devait ici, dans le domaine de la philosophie et de ses techniques, prendre grande allure, dans le mesure où la langue latine était, de l’aveu de tous, et de Boèce lui-même, fort dépourvue. Cicéron jadis s’y était employée; Boèce allait, plus encore sans doute que pour ses contemporains, procurer au moyen âge l’outillage verbal nécessaire à ses spéculations: le *quod est* et *esse* en est, en métaphysique, un parfait exemple. Il introduit des contenues impossibles à inventorier, des dynamismes sémantiques obscurs; et, en même temps, en parfait homogénéité avec sa noétique de la *forma*, il amènera les maîtres de l’École à parler *formaliter*.

Parmi les concepts ainsi mis en circulation, un premier lot provient d’un simple transfert du grec, selon divers procédés et à divers degrés de latinisation. Ainsi *proportio* traduit *ánalogía* de Porphyre (In Isag., II, 6, éd. Brandt., p. 94); *figurae* (traduit) *schémata*, au lieu de *genera* quae proposuit Victorinus (*ibid.*, I, 12, p. 34). *Contingens* transpose l’*endeichómenon* d’Aristote, fût-ce à travers une error d’interprétation. (underlineation added)

M.-D. Chenu, O.P., *LA THÉOLOGIE AU DOUZIÈME SIÈCLE*. Préface d’Étienne Gilson de l’Académie française (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1967), at 146.

Within the logical context of the *DE INTERPRETATIONE*, *endeichómenon*, as translated by *contingens*, is the attribution of a possibility to a thing or, used as a substantive, denotes such a possibility. It is unfortunate that Chénu has not provided any citation for his reference *supra* to Aristotle’s use of *endeichómenon* as translated by “contingens.” However, several pertinent references are available from Liddell & Scott (New Edition, 1961), at 559<sup>a</sup>, s.v. *ἐνδεχόμενα*. These include an abstract usage described as “freq. in Arist.” that is found variously in the *Analytica Priora* 25<sup>a</sup>38 al., *Physica* 203<sup>b</sup>30; *Politica* 1275<sup>b</sup>6, *Metaphysica* 1009<sup>b</sup>34, *Politica* 1325<sup>a</sup>10, *De Generatione Animalium* 731<sup>b</sup>25, *Metaphysica* 1050<sup>b</sup>11, *Ethica Nichomachea* 1134<sup>b</sup>31; and an impersonal usage (i.e., “it is possible”) in *Rhetorica* 1354<sup>a</sup>32, *De Generatione Animalium* 765<sup>b</sup>23, and *De Partibus Animalium* 683<sup>a</sup>20. The Aristotelian usage of ‘contingency’ and its cognates is of course open to discussion, but it is evident from the citations given that it is for the most part abstract or impersonal; an exception may be its application to a concrete practice in the *Ethica Nichomachea* 1139<sup>a</sup>7. It is not too much to say that it is predominately the abstract sense of “contingens” that was received by St. Thomas from the Latin tradition informed by Boethius, and the sense in which he understood the term.

made it possible to affirm without contradiction that a creature's essential perfection is a potentiality for existence but that the creatures' essential perfection does not require its existence. This implied that in any creature, *esse* and *essentia* be analytically and thus metaphysically --- "really" --- distinct as potency and act are irreducibly distinct. This "real distinction" in turn required, or presupposed, a new act-potency analysis unknown to Aristotelianism, the substantial analysis of *esse-essentia*, in addition to the essential analyses of form-matter and accident-substance. This was only to recognize that the essential perfection, or essence, of a creature relates to its existence as potency to act. This essence-esse polarity could not be reduced to the substance-accident polarity, as some Arabian students of Aristotle had supposed, nor to the form-matter distinction, because both of these polarities were intrinsic to essence and thus constitutive of essential potentiality: they could not account for the non-necessary substantial existence of the creature *qua* creature. Thus, to uphold the doctrine of creation, a new act-potency correlation or polarity was necessary, the *esse-essentia* relation.

#### A. The two senses of contingency in creation *passive spectata*

St. Thomas's explanation of the existence of the created universe as contingent requires that it be contingent in two distinct senses: (1) essentially contingent, in the sense of analytically intelligible in terms of the form-matter and accident-substance analyses, and thus creatable, and (2) substantially or existentially contingent, in the sense of actually created, thus as satisfying the substantial *esse-essentia* analysis.

Essential contingency is the capacity for existence that is held to be inherent in the universe's intrinsic or essential intelligibility, i.e., its a priori capacity to exist, to be created. Substantial contingency applies to the actual, concretely created, existing world, and describes the non-necessity of the relation between its essence and its existence. Simply put, essential contingency is an a priori attribute of a complete essence, while substantial contingency is an a posteriori attribute of an actually created reality.

Thus, the created universe's essential contingency is its abstract capacity for actual existence, as opposed to the abstract necessity for existence that Aristotle supposed to be included within the intelligibility of all essential perfection. For Aristotle, essence as intrinsically intelligible cannot not exist. For St. Thomas, essence as intrinsically intelligible is capable of existence, but need not exist.

It may be argued that this apriorism is in such clear violation of the *ex nihilo* character of creation as to be an absurdity. However, the natural universe postulated by St. Thomas' understanding of creation is composed of intrinsically interrelated creatures each of whose essences is an actualized potentiality for existence, in such wise that the inference of the a priori creatability of each creature is inescapable: this potentiality is fundamental to the *esse-essence* relation.

Aristotle knew no separate act-potency relation peculiar to the *esse-essentia* polarity; for him, any finite essence is a substance whose existence is a proper accident, a necessary implication of its essential intelligibility and therefore inherent in that intelligibility. For Aristotle, any essential definition pertains to a thing that must exist. For St. Thomas, essential definitions pertain to things that may exist but need not.

St. Thomas, refusing the Aristotelian equation of essence and existent substance, therefore makes actual substance to be contingent in the order of existence. From this stance, existence cannot be related to essence as its necessary implication, thus as a proper accident, but has a novel extrinsic relation to essence that is not necessary but is contingent, an actuation of an essential possibility for existence, but not of an essential necessity to exist. Thomas gave a metaphysical standing to this contingency: the novel act-potency polarity of *esse-essentia*, unknown to Aristotle's metaphysics. This polarity constitutes the substantial perfection of all finite realities. However, it is not a free polarity; it is only contingent. It could not be free, for the Aristotelian act-potency causes that constitute essence exhaust its intelligibility: it has no free intelligibility, and therefore has no potentiality for free existence. Once again, an Aristotelian essence is not creatable in the doctrinal sense of the term, which demands the freedom of the existence and cannot be satisfied with its mere contingency.

Summarily, St. Thomas understands substantial contingency --- the contingency of the actually created universe --- to be the non-identity of, or the real distinction between, its essence and its existence. Thus he postulates an intrinsic distinction between essence and its existence in all created being. Substantial or existential contingency, thus regarded, is the foundation of the analogy of being which, given St. Thomas' interpretation of the relation between the Absolute Being of the Creator and the relative being of the creature, requires that creatures be distinct from their Creator by existing contingently rather than necessarily, and thus to have a real distinction between their essence and their existence, a distinction not found in the Creator. This is to give the *esse* of the creature a metaphysical standing by which the creature is positively related to the absolute *Esse* of the Creator

It follows that St. Thomas has identified substantial contingency with contingency in existence. This is to transform an abstraction, existential contingency, into a concrete reality, a mistake that amounts to the confusion of contingency with freedom. While freedom is unthinkable apart from a teleology, contingency knows nothing of such purposiveness; it is indistinguishable from randomness. But the freedom of creation *active spectata*, i.e., the freedom of the Creator to create, and the consequent free existence of the creature, cannot be deduced from the contingency of creation, for contingency has no teleological content: it adds nothing whatever to the intelligibility of essence, which remains intrinsically necessary despite the Thomist postulate of its contingent existence.

It is then not too much to say that the Thomist metaphysics has its foundation in the abstract contingency that St. Thomas assigned to creation *passive spectata* (the created universe, as op-

posed to the divine act of creating it, or creation *active spectata*). But the contingency of the created order imposes burdens on that metaphysics which threaten to reduce it to an identity system, a set of necessary inferences grounded in the act-potency analysis whose logically necessary causes contradict the Thomist postulate of an essential contingency underlying creation as its prior possibility.

It must be kept in view that for St. Thomas, the created universe, and all its included substances, are intelligible “naturally,” which is to say, in terms of the necessitarian act-potency analyses of substance-accident, matter-form which St. Thomas understands as did Aristotle, for these two act-potency analyses undergo no conversion to freedom in the Thomist metaphysics, nor do they in the Thomist psychology and epistemology. Insofar as these disciplines are constituted by this “natural” knowledge, dissociated from the Mission of the Son, they can conclude only to necessary reasons, necessary causes, in the order of matter and form, substance and accident. It is clear enough that contingency can have no part in these analyses, for contingency refers only to the substantial, essence-esse relation and is radically inapplicable to the essential matter-form and substance-accident analyses of the necessary reasons constitutive of finite material essences.

#### B. The ungraced or natural creation

The correlative contingencies, essential and substantial, of the created order, of the universe, are indispensable to St. Thomas’ understanding of creation as “natural,” which is to say, as ungraced. St. Thomas considered the truth of the doctrine of creation to be available to natural reason by way of the discursive process set out in the “five ways.” Similarly, he affirmed the natural character of creation *passive spectata* in the sense of its being ungraced: he did this with little systematic analysis. Until late in his life, he took for granted, as the Thomist metaphysical tradition has continued to do, that creation, which by definition cannot but be universally distributed, is therefore “natural” in the sense of being independent of the Mission of the Son to give the Spirit. For the Thomist metaphysics, what is universally distributed cannot be gratuitously distributed, and vice versa: the realm of the universal is the realm of nature. Thus “nature,” as the object of creation, is not gratuitous in the sense of graced: the problem of the “double gratuity” -- - of grace and of nature --- then arises. We shall refer to it again.

As a corollary of the universality of the natural, St. Thomas also presupposed, following the Augustinian and, generally, the entire patristic tradition, that grace (usually identified with the grace of conversion) is not universally distributed; this requires the Thomist interpretation that whatever is known to be universally given in the human condition, i.e., what is *nativa* in the sense used by Vatican I’s *Dei Filius* when speaking of our innate capacity to know God, and to know the moral law,<sup>2</sup> is necessarily given and therefore natural, in the sense of ungraced. The

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<sup>2</sup> The doctrinal hermeneutics of Vatican I’s Dogmatic Constitution, *DEI FILIUS* (DS §§3000-3045) is discussed at some length in *THOMISM AND THE ONTOLOGICAL THEOLOGY OF PAUL TILLICH: A comparison of systems* (Leiden: Brill,

universal ability to know God, as “native” to the human condition, is natural, as is the similarly “native” knowledge of the laws of moral conduct.

It must be remembered the early St. Thomas had no illumination doctrine: his “faculty psychology,” borrowed from Aristotle, took for granted the autonomy of human reason which he understood, as created, to be a participation in the divine Mind implicit in any intellectual creature. Insofar as he discussed illumination, he understood it to be identifiable with the agent intellect proper to every human person simply as rational.<sup>3</sup> For St. Thomas, conformity to natural rationality, i.e., to the laws of discursive reason, sufficed for a natural knowledge of God and of the natural law. This conformity of the human mind to the truth of God and of the moral law could and did fail by reason of various accidental obscurities native to our historical situation, but for St. Thomas, the failure was of rationality, a matter of mistake or ignorance, invincible or otherwise. Within the Thomist view of the natural law, rationality and morality therefore tended to merge, to identify, as in the Platonic tradition, which leaves insoluble the problem of moral freedom in the “natural” condition.

This problem is specifically Thomist. In the older (patristic and early medieval) Augustinian tradition, the illumined mind was freed from its immanence by a universal illumination, enabled to grasp a Truth that, as a gift, could only be freely appropriated.<sup>4</sup> A refusal of Truth was clearly immoral, but it was not the refusal of a necessary truth and hence not, in that determinist sense, irrational: the refusal can be logically defended, as we know too well. The later St. Thomas will rediscover the Augustinian *trahi a Deo* as indispensable to the conversion of the infidel, but too late to give it a metaphysical analysis.<sup>5</sup>

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1971), 71-77. Specifically, in that Constitution, “nativa” designates concrete, historical universality: it cannot be assimilated to the Thomist understanding of “naturalis,” which denotes a necessarily abstract universality incapable of providing a criterion for the postulate of universal free moral responsibility presupposed by the natural law tradition.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Copleston disagreed with this commonplace: see his *MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY*, PART I, 78-80; Part II, 110.

<sup>4</sup> The classic Thomist reduction of Augustinian illumination to the agent intellect is dispersed in eight articles by as many authors in *AUGUSTINUS MAGISTER I: COMMUNICATIONS* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1954), 425-520. A refutation of that reduction appears in my development of Augustinian metaphysical theology in the latter half of Ch. 6, *COVENANTAL THEOLOGY: The Eucharistic order of history*. Revised and enlarged edition. Two volumes in one, with an Appendix (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> The conviction that the truth is free, a gift of understanding, is unknown outside the Judaeo-Christian revelation and thus is unknown to the Greek philosophical tradition; particularly, it has no role in the Aristotelianism that St. Thomas wished to convert to Christian purposes. Consequently St. Thomas tended to confuse the predicamental truth concerning the material essences proper to an ungraced creation with transcendental or moral truth of free actions within that supposedly ungraced creation: witness his late recognition of the problem posed by the moral responsibility of the infidel: see n. 34, *infra*, for its discussion. That problem permits no such confusion: the possibility of the sinful infidelity of a pagan, i.e., of his personally responsible refusal of conversion to Christianity, is the refusal of a graced freedom that cannot but be universally distributed and yet which cannot be a proper accident: conversion to Truth himself cannot be the subject of a predicamental option, a morally indifferent preference *de gustibus* of one thing over another, despite Pascal’s essay in reducing salvific faith to actuarial dimensions.

## 1. The submission of ungraced creation to intrinsic rational necessity

As a disciple of Aristotle in his metaphysics, St. Thomas accepted without question the Aristotelian postulate of the intrinsically necessary intelligibility of material reality, as is illustrated by St. Thomas' exploitation of the Aristotelian metaphysical analysis, in terms of act-potency causality, even in his Christology. He understood this intrinsic act-potency analysis to provide at once the structure of created being and the structure of discursive reason, indifferently. In brief, the act-potency structure of the logically correct judgment is paralleled and, as it were, underwritten, by the intrinsically necessary act-potency structure of material being. The analysis of judgment corresponds to the analysis of substance.

Consequently, insofar as "natural," material substances were understood by St. Thomas to have an intrinsic intelligibility comprehensible in terms of the necessary causes inherent in the act-potency metaphysical analysis. As a Christian he understood all such substances to be created and, as created, to be freed of existential necessity: i.e., necessity in the order of existence.

As created, which is to say, as contingent in being, the creature has a necessary relation of dependency upon the free act of the Creator, which accounts for its non-necessity, and so accounts for the distinction in it between essence and existence. St. Thomas considered this existential or substantial contingency to be consistent with the creature's intrinsic or essential necessity. Again without much analysis, he supposed any intrinsically intelligible material essence to be creatable, capable of a relation to existence. In a famous debate with St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas defended the creatability of an essentially eternal world, one having no temporal limit.<sup>6</sup> Even in the 13<sup>th</sup> century position of that ancient argument, it is quite clear that St. Thomas does not consider "esse" to add anything to the substantial intelligibility of a created material entity for, in arguing for the possibility of an eternal creature, he only defended its intrinsic rationality, taking the creatability of an intrinsically intelligible material essence for granted. Étienne Gilson, one of the greatest Thomists of the last century, once accepted this view; it still appeals, evidently, to Cardinal Ratzinger.<sup>7</sup> Yet it is clear enough that in the first place, possibility and necessity coin-

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<sup>6</sup> Cyril Vollert, S.J., L. Kendzierski, and P. Byrne, eds., *ST. THOMAS, SIGER OF BRABANT AND ST. BONAVENTURE ON THE ETERNITY OF THE WORLD (DE AETERNITATE MUNDI)*; tr. with an introduction (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> As observed in n. 43, Introduction, *COVENANTAL THEOLOGY*, at 68:

See Étienne Gilson's justification of science in *BEING AND SOME PHILOSOPHERS*, second edition, corrected and enlarged (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952) 161ff. Gilson then distinguished "substance" as essence from reality as existential substance; science deals with the intelligibility intrinsic to essence, and does so in an Aristotelian mode:

Such is the way the world of Aristotle can enter the Christian world of Thomas Aquinas, but there remains now for us to see that, while it enters it whole, it also becomes wholly different. The world of Aristotle is there whole in so far as reality is substance. It is the world of science, eternal, self-subsistent and such that no problem concerning existence need nor can be asked about it.

Gilson, *BEING AND SOME PHILOSOPHERS*, second edition, corrected and enlarged (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952), 166.

See also n.139, Ch. 1, *COVENANTAL THEOLOGY*, at 207. Ratzinger has written in a similar fashion: see n. 54, ch. 1, *ibid.*, at 192, where the following observation appears:

cide in the intelligibility of a material essence composed of matter-form and substance-accident; such an essence is capable of only a logical contingency, for it has no intrinsic or metaphysical potentiality that is not already actuated. Its existence may be regarded as a proper accident, but in fact, its essence and its existence coincide. Secondly, when one is dealing with the intelligibility of an actually created eternal universe, one must discuss it in terms of the existential actualization of its essential potency, which is to say, of its contingent intelligibility. But the act and potency analysis of intrinsic intelligibility permits only necessary conclusions, which annul any metaphysical dependency upon creation for existence. The basic problem is really rather simple: contingency does not and cannot bespeak freedom, while creation does: one cannot have it both ways.

The question must then arise whether the *esse-essentia* composition of a created substance is metaphysical or logical: viz., is it real, or merely nominal?<sup>8</sup> This difficulty recurs throughout the Thomist metaphysics of creation: the realist emphasis tends to move toward the quasi-panteism for which Barth condemned the Thomist notion of the analogy of being, an analogy independent of grace, and therefore stating a necessary relation of essence to existence, thus a necessary creation whose necessity renders the divine autonomy merely nominal, while the nominalist emphasis finds waiting in the wings the monadism of Leibniz and Spinoza. Essentially complete substances, *indivisum in se et divisum ab omni alio*, are capable of only logical interrelation, i.e., of relation *ab extrinseco*, imposed by an independent mind. A “universe” of such monadic substances can have only an extrinsic unity, i.e., a logical unity imposed from without. Such a universe has only a nominal unity and thus is only nominally a universe, whose creation is similarly

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....see the discussion of the relation between knowledge as faith and as science by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in *PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*; tr. Sr. Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (Ignatius Press, 1987), citing R. Brague, “Was heisst Christliche Erfahrung?” *INTERNATIONALE KATHOLISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT* 5 (1976) at 482; it includes the following statement:

In a scientific experiment, the object of experience is not free. The experiment depends, rather, on the fact that nature is controlled (which is why Heidegger labeled the technique “*Ge-stell*”: a “set-up”). R. Brague expresses it this way: “Because we have removed from it everything that might be a freedom (vagueness, contingency, etc.), it can become the object of science.”

Ratzinger, *PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY*, at 348.

It is reasonably clear that Ratzinger does not in fact approve Brague’s general identification of freedom with “vagueness, contingency, etc.” Rather, he approves, without much consideration, a notion of science as the quest for necessary causes common even among scientists for some years after Gödel’s “proofs” had shown its impossibility.

<sup>8</sup> The reality of the “real distinction” is perennially debated. Following its inclusion in the “Twenty-four Theses,” Thomists are generally identified as such by their insistence upon the “real distinction” (i.e., the metaphysical distinction) between essence and existence; this is equivalent to their insistence upon the validity of the act-potency metaphysical analysis. However, since Duns Scotus the reality of the distinction, and the validity of the analysis, have been challenged, most notably by Jesuits: i.e., by Francis Suarez, whose *DISPUTATIONES METAPHYSICAE* pivot on his rejection of the “real distinction,” more recently by Bernard Lonergan, whose *METHOD IN THEOLOGY* follows Suarez by merging essence and existence into “central form,” and most recently by Francis Cunningham, in *ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE IN THOMAS: A Mental vs. the “Real Distinction”* (Lanham, MD: The University Press of America, 1988). It is at least arguable that the objection to the “real distinction” is inchoate in the phenomenologically-grounded uneasiness of Franciscan theologians of Augustinian persuasion over the influence of Aristotle’s rationalism in theology during the latter half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century: on this tension, see Frederick J Roensch., *EARLY THOMIST SCHOOLS* (Dubuque: The Priory Press, 1964).



nominal, and whose Creator is of the same nominal order. Such a Creator is neither the object nor the subject of a real relation. The contingent creation is only a nominal creation, with a correspondingly nominal Creator.

It is finally the act-potency presumption of a rationally necessary unity of substance that is put in issue by the doctrine of creation. This problem is largely masked, whether by the rationalist moment in Thomism itself,<sup>9</sup> or by the later influence of the Enlightenment; yet it is native to Aristotelianism and inescapable in Thomism, as is clear enough in the failure of Aristotle's *De Anima* to resolve the problem of locating the agent intellect,<sup>10</sup> and in the current failure of the Thomist anthropology to account for the irreducibility of sexual differentiation within the unity of the human species.<sup>11</sup> A monadic view of substance has controlled abstract speculative thought from its inception in the sixth century B.C.: its dilemmas were immediately recognized, and have been shown incapable of rational transcendence. The Kantian critiques did little more than recirculate them. Gödel's incompleteness theorems, published in 1931, pointed out to a reluctant academy the impossibility of a monadic comprehension of any non-trivial reality, thus eliminating the basis for the Enlightenment's confidence in reason, yet Gödel said little more than was already grasped by Aristotle's assertion of the potential nature of all human understanding ---

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<sup>9</sup> This preoccupation was normalized by Cajetan, whose late medieval interpretation of St. Thomas developed a rationalism only latent in St. Thomas' thought. Nonetheless this latency, officially promulgated in such documents as the "Twenty-four Theses," (AAS 6 [1914] 383-386) became the Thomism of the schools, from which de Lubac departed, and after him a host of former Thomists. Departures from that orthodoxy are manifest in Lonergan's phenomenological reading of Thomist metaphysics in *METHOD IN THEOLOGY*, in Teilhard's rejection of the Suarezian Thomism taught him at the Jesuit scholasticate in Jersey in favor of a Neoplatonizing evolutionary approach to Christology, in Karl Rahner's adaptation of the Heideggerian "turn to the subject," and in Hans Urs von Balthasar's rejection of systematic theology as such in favor of a theological aesthetics.

<sup>10</sup> *DE ANIMA* III, 5, 20-25, *THE BASIC WORKS OF ARISTOTLE*, at 592. On the problem of locating the agent intellect, see David Knowles, *THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIEVAL THOUGHT*; ser. Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1962), 209ff. St. Thomas understood the agent intellect, in conjunction with the possible intellect, to be the principle of the immortality of the soul, and he concluded, on this dogmatic ground, that it must be intrinsic to each person. However, this sets a theological problem; it does not resolve the metaphysical difficulty set in Aristotle's *DE ANIMA*: see Leo Keeler, S.J., *SANCTI THOMAE AQUINATIS TRACTATUS DE UNITATE INTELLECTUS CONTRA AVERROISTAS*; editio critica; ser. Textus et Documenta, Series Philosophica 12 (Romae: Universitas Gregoriana, 1946), and *SANCTI THOMAE AQUINATIS TRACTATUS DE SPIRITUALIBUS CREATURIS*; editio critica; ser. Textus et Documenta, Series Philosophica 13 (Romae: Universitas Gregoriana, 1959), esp. art. 10, 119-135.

<sup>11</sup> If the sexual distinction is held to be accidental, it cannot be constitutive of the human person as the Catholic tradition holds it to be: see John Paul II, *LETTER TO FAMILIES* (2 February, 1994), §§6-8, 11. If, on the other hand, either male or female sexuality is understood to be constitutive of the human person, and one accepts as well, with St. Thomas, the substantial unity of the human person, then the substantial unity of the human species is abandoned: in fact, the Thomist metaphysics knows no concrete human unity beyond the personal: Thomas understood the "species" to be only second substance, an abstraction. However, communication between persons requires their substantial identity; when each person is substantially complete, thus substantially distinct, no interpersonal communication can occur. St. Thomas ignores this difficulty in his discussion of the "comforting" of lesser angels by the greater, for he understands each angel to "exhaust its species." Be that as it may, these problems have no "natural" (i.e., rational) solution when substance is understood, as by St. Thomas, to be "indivisum in se, divisum ab omni alio."

and Aristotle had provided no more than a variant of Plato's deprecation of all historical knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

The quest for the rational unity of substance generates ineluctably the problem of the one and the many. It has found no rational solution, in the sense of one satisfying a "natural" quest for necessary reasons.<sup>13</sup> This failure is at once in accounting for the substantial unity of being and for the rational unity of understanding. Idealist and empiricist attempts at providing its solution always entail flights from history incompatible with historicity of the Catholic *quaerens intellectum*.<sup>14</sup> We shall return to the problem of the analogous unity of being

## 2. The substantial contingency of the ungraced creature

St. Thomas uniformly speaks of creation *active spectata* as contingent rather than as free, for he is concerned to establish only the non-necessity of the essence-esse relation. With this non-necessity in place, creation may be said to be not impossible, therefore contingent, because the creature does not necessarily exist as a matter of its own inner intelligibility. By this device, St. Thomas remains free to use Aristotle's deterministic matter-form and substance-accident analyses to examine the contingently created essential order. In his view, creatures are intelligible only in terms of these two analyses; his epistemology presupposes these essential analyses: e.g., the agent intellect abstracts form from matter. St. Thomas's metaphysics never provided for the intrinsic freedom of truth of created being. Until late in his life, he did not appear to have understood creatures to possess a free truth except insofar as accidentally graced.

According to St. Thomas' metaphysical *esse-essentia* analysis, creatures are extrinsically contingent insofar as created: i.e., while every creature as a creature has a relation of dependence upon God the Creator, the Creator is Absolute, *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, and therefore is necessarily unrelated to his creation, for He would not otherwise be absolute, and thereby would cease to be God.

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<sup>12</sup> See Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, *GÖDEL'S PROOF* (New York: New York University Press, 1958) for a non-technical exposition of these theorems. Stanley Jaki has frequently referred to Gödel's work: see, e.g., *THE RELEVANCE OF PHYSICS* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), passim, and *THE SAVIOR OF SCIENCE* (Chicago: Regnery, 1988), passim.

<sup>13</sup> The rationalist *quaerens intellectum* was closed down in 1931 by Kurt Gödel's publication of his "incompleteness theorems;" on this, see Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, *GÖDEL'S PROOF* (New York: New York University Press, 1958). The revolutionary implications of Gödel's work are still not well understood: it simply precludes the rational optimism, the celebration of autonomous rationality *qua* secular, that has characterized the post-Enlightenment academy.

<sup>14</sup> Since the publication of *FIDES ET RATIO* (14 September, 1998), neither is it possible to isolate theology from philosophy or vice versa; so also for other similarly debated polarities: matter and form, essence and existence, faith and reason, grace and nature, and all the rest, for the historical intelligence is a single *quaerens*, with a single substantial object: no dichotomy in either is acceptable, despite the failure of "natural reason" to resolve them.

For St. Thomas, the *esse-essentia* “contingency” of the created world sufficed to guard the doctrine of creation out of nothingness: i.e. out of no subject independent of the Creator, and of nothing from the Creator, thus “ex nihilo sui et subjecti.” Thus the intrinsic or essential intelligibility of the created order is explained in terms of the intrinsically necessary causes discovered by the Aristotelian act-potency analysis, while its extrinsic or substantial intelligibility is simply the existential contingency, the non-necessity of its existence, as postulated by the doctrine of creation--- a contingency that can be accounted for only in terms of the unqualified power of the Creator who, in this context, is indistinguishable from Ockham’s *potentia absoluta* (Ockham’s Nominalism, with its rejection of all metaphysics, is little more than the implication of this rationalization of the divine Substance). The Creator’s exercise of omnipotence is of course extrinsic to the created universe; it establishes no real relation to it or to the created essences that compose the universe. Because an exercise of divine omnipotence can establish no relation to its object, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to account other than nominally for the relation of the creature to the Creator asserted by St. Thomas, for it does not enter into their intrinsic or essential intelligibility. Consequently that relation, as extrinsic, has no intelligible content. While it is obvious that St. Thomas understands the creature’s relation to the Creator to be constitutive of the creature on the substantial or existential level posited by his excogitation of the *esse-essentia* relation, for that relation to be verified, it must enter also into the essential constitution of the creature, otherwise the *esse-essentia* relation itself can be only nominal: there must be a basis in essence for its relation to *esse* if that relation is to be intelligible.

When the *Deus unus* of St. Thomas, the Creator, is the Absolute, without relation to what is not himself and in fact, incapable of such relation, one cannot speak other than nominally of a “motive for the creation,” e.g., sheer divine benevolence. Such language evokes an impossible relation of the Creator to creation. St. Thomas is clear, as are his disciples, that the Creator is not related to his creation, although the creation is related to him as to its cause and source, to the point of being identified with that relation.

We have said that St. Thomas assumed without question that an intrinsically necessary finite entity, an Aristotelian essence, can be created: i.e., that the intrinsic necessity indispensable to such an essence does not belie its substantial contingency. This assumption is of course flatly contradictory to the Aristotelian supposition of the eternity of necessary beings. The Aristotelian supposition operates on the level of essence which, for Aristotle, is identical with the level of substance, of reality *qua tale* which, as essentially constituted, i.e., intrinsically intelligible, cannot but exist.

This is to say that for Aristotle, existence is at most a proper accident, an intrinsic implication, of essence. Because it is the intention of St. Thomas to uphold the doctrine of creation, he cannot but disagree. Therefore St. Thomas requires that existence be not a necessary implication of essence, but a possibility inherent in essence: a sort of “obediential potency,” to borrow a term excogitated for other purposes but entirely applicable here for, from that creationist viewpoint, essence has become potential substance, but not actual substance as essence is in Aristotelian

metaphysics. However, this rationalization of creation *ex nihilo*, like the comparable rationalization of *gratia Christi ex nihilo* that provides the Incarnation with a similarly antecedent “obediential potency,”<sup>15</sup> cannot serve. This potentiality for existence cannot be intrinsic to essence, for all intrinsic essential intelligibility is necessary, while within the creationist context, the capacity to exist cannot be necessary.

Were that capacity or potentiality for existence, that ‘obediential potency,’ to be included within the immanent intelligibility of essence, creation would not be *ex nihilo*, for it would have a prior possibility in essence. Further, it could only be included within the intrinsic intelligibility of essence as a proper accident is included, i.e., an accident that must be actuated: thus it could not but exist, and would not be a possible object of creation *ex nihilo*. Therefore, were contingency intrinsic to the intelligibility of a created essence, it would contradict its essential intelligibility as a creature created *ex nihilo sui et subjecti*.

Contingency connotes not the purposefulness of freedom but randomness, in that it affirms simply the extrinsic or substantial non-necessity of that to which it pertains. But for Aristotle, and for St. Thomas when dealing with the natural world, intelligibility is identified with the immanently necessary causes of an essence. The random, the contingent, the non-necessary, name precisely the unintelligible. Kant has explored this consequence, and a great deal of ink has been devoted to the refutation of his conclusion, a refutation which became systematic in Maréchal’s “transcendental” Thomism and in supposed variants of it as proposed by Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan. Étienne Gilson, one of the most influential Thomists of the past century, notoriously refused that idealistic interpretation of St Thomas; in this he is hardly alone. The Kantian critique of metaphysics postulates and defends the rational adequacy of the immanent structure of thought to account for human intellection. Maréchal relied upon the postulate that the mind’s final cause is a transcendent truth that the mind cannot but seek, and which frees it, a priori, of its own immanence. However, unless that final cause be understood to be gratuitous in the sense of an illumination *ab extra*, a gift of a free because transcendent truth, the universally distributed immanent dynamism of thought upon which Maréchal relied cannot transcend its own essential immanence for, as an intrinsic cause, it is locked into essential immanence. Consequently the absolute that the mind cannot but seek can only be an immanent absolute, an idealist “immanentization of the eschaton.”

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<sup>15</sup> It may be recalled that this is a long-standing criticism of Karl Rahner’s Christology: see H. U. von Balthasar, *CORDULA, ODER DER ERNSTFALL*, mit einem Nachwort zur zweiten Aufl. (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1967) [ET: *THE MOMENT OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS*; tr. Richard Beckley (Glen Rock, NJ: The Newman Press, 1969)], Walter Kasper, *JESUS THE CHRIST*; tr. V. Green (London: Burns and Oates; New York, Ramsey, NJ, Toronto: The Paulist Press, 1976), esp. ch. 2; Jean Galot, S. J., *WHO IS CHRIST: THEOLOGY OF THE INCARNATION* (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press 1981), 31-34, 279-80, and F. Ocariz *et al.*, *THE MYSTERY OF JESUS CHRIST* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994) 127-129. It must be remembered that St. Thomas uses the esse-essentia analysis for the hypostatic union as well as for creation. The ‘double gratuity’ is methodologically single.

On the other hand, if the transcendent finality postulated by Maréchal and his school is gratuitous, the metaphysical problem posed by Kant has been abandoned as false rather than resolved on its own terms. Whether or not the Kantian *Critique of Pure Reason* actually applies to the Thomist metaphysics is of course debated, but too many Thomists have taken Maréchal's transcendental Thomism seriously to permit one to dismiss the Kantian critique out of hand. While it can hardly be doubted that St. Thomas' mind is larger than his system, it is the act-potency analysis underlying the Thomist system, as rationally developed by Cajetan and his followers (a development recognized only lately to be a rationalist distortion of St. Thomas' metaphysical vision), that is the object of Kant's criticism.<sup>16</sup> However, the matter is of interest here only as an illustration of the unintelligibility of a universe whose creation is reduced to the contingent existence of essences which cannot not exist.

The contingency St. Thomas assigns to creation is therefore more than problematic. Obviously, the contingency of creation must pertain to substance, since that is the terminus of the act of creation: i.e., of creation *active spectata*. In that substantial sense the contingency of creation *passive spectata* is intrinsic: i.e., intrinsic to substance, and indispensable to its intelligibility as created. However, contingency cannot enter into the definition of created substance because, for St. Thomas as for Aristotle, definitions pertain to the intelligibility of essence, not of existential substance. Substance, as unique, as the individuated concrete reality, i.e., as individuated, cannot be defined; at best, i.e., as an intellectual supposit, it can only be named. Thus, substantial contingency does not and cannot enter, for example, into the definition of man. The consequent identification of the intelligibility of the passive creation with the immanent necessities of essence is of course impossible for St. Thomas, for it excludes the intelligibility of existence as contingent, as substantial. Nonetheless, the unintelligibility of existence as contingent is the direct consequence of supposing "contingency," in the proper sense of the term: viz., abstract non-necessity, to provide for the essence-esse distinction upon which the Thomist metaphysics of creation depends. To repeat: the attribution of substantial, existential contingency, is unintelligible when it is attributed to an intrinsically necessary essence that, as necessarily existent, possesses no intrinsically intelligible potentiality for existence. Such an attribution has only a nominal standing, not a real one.

Passive creation in St. Thomas' sense of an existentially contingent universe is therefore unintelligible: it is intrinsically contradictory, for its essential truth, its essential perfection, its immanent necessity, is flatly contradicted by the attribution to it of a contingent existence.

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<sup>16</sup> Although it is notoriously the Suarezian version of scholastic metaphysics, taken up and popularized by Christian Wolf, with which Kant was familiar, Maréchal and his followers have seen in the *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON* an assault upon the Thomist "real distinction," and in this they are not mistaken. The idealist implication of the Aristotelian metaphysical analysis was waiting in the wings for exploitation in Kant's criticism of metaphysics as a realistic enterprise, with the consequence that the Thomist insistence upon the real distinction between *esse* and *essentia* (dropped first by Duns Scotus, then by Suarez, and recently by Lonergan), stands in the way of that reductionism.

Nonetheless, let us suppose for the purposes of discussion that the material universe is created, however paradoxically. Its unity as a universe, together with the spatio-temporal extension implicit in its materiality, would require either an indivisible universe, i.e., a single Parmenidean monadic substance *indivisum in se, divisum ab omni alio*, locked into its own immanence, or a divided universe, i.e. a concatenation of indefinitely numerous monadic substances, each substantially distinct, each locked in its own immanence, each with only extrinsic relations to the others: in brief, the atoms-in-the-void of early atomist speculation, which can be a universe only in a nominal, non-metaphysical sense, for it has no intelligible unity. Neither alternative of course is intelligible: the Parmenidean universe is unknowable, for from it no information can emerge, while its alternative, the divided universe, is in a precisely similar case: one can speak of neither as creatable without supposing an observational vantage-point extrinsic to the “universe.” To assign this observation point to the Creator is merely to pose further insoluble problems.

### C. The contingency of creation *active spectata*

From the foregoing analysis, it is evident that “contingency” has nihilistic overtones: to grant it metaphysical standing is to annul the substantial intelligibility of creation and, with that, the substantial intelligibility of the Creator. We have been concerned heretofore for implications of existential or substantial contingency with respect to creation “passive spectata:” i.e., with respect to the universe created *ex nihilo sui et subjecti*. We must now examine its implications for creation “active spectata:” i.e., for the Creator’s causing the universe to exist. These implications are equally nihilistic.

The contingency of creation *active spectata* is particularly important for St. Thomas because his view of creation as natural must understand the Creator in natural terms, i.e., as the Absolute who is understood to be contingently and therefore abstractly the Creator: thus the Creator understood simply as the *Deus unus*, inasmuch as St. Thomas denies that the Trinity is naturally knowable. It is evident enough that a “natural” creation can hardly be attributed to a divinely revealed Trinity whose revelation is precisely of a covenantal relation to the good creation. Therefore a “natural” creation requires, as has been said, that the divine creative act not be understood to be Trinitarian: creation *active spectata* does not evoke the Father’s sending of the Son to give the Spirit.

Reduced then to dealing with the Creator as *Monas*,<sup>17</sup> as the uniquely omnipotent Person who is God, the Creator, St. Thomas could only refer to him in absolute terms: the relational Names --

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<sup>17</sup> “Monas” is hardly a Thomist expression. Although its evident modalistic connotations, however interesting, cannot be dealt with here, it has a quite respectable theological standing: Newman, for example, almost as if anticipating Rahner’s *THE TRINITY*, has written that:

No one is to be called a Theist, who does not believe in a Personal God, whatever difficulty there may be in defining the word “Personal.” Now it is the belief of Catholics about the Supreme Being, that this essential characteristic of His Nature is reiterated in three distinct ways or modes; so that the Almighty God, instead of being One Person only, which is the teaching of Natural Religion, has Three Personalities, and is at once, according as we view Him in the one or the other of

- Father, Son, Spirit --- are of course Trinitarian. While in a number of places St. Thomas did assign the Son and the Spirit a role in creation, he did not do this in the theological context of the Son's Mission by the Father to give the Spirit. Rather, a creative role was given them by reason of the dogma of their consubstantiality, their possession of the Divine Substance in its fullness, whereby each is God, but not God from God, Light from Light, nor the *Spiritus Creator*. The Son and Spirit are assimilated to the *Deus unus*: anything more is by way of accommodation. When dealing with his role as Creator, St. Thomas speaks of the One God much as Newman has written of the *Monas*, i.e., as a Person substantially identified with the Son and the Spirit as well as with the Father.<sup>18</sup> The Son and Spirit are involved in creation *active spectata* only by accommodation: it as divine, not as a Person, that each is the Creator.

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them, the Father, the Son and the Spirit---a Divine Three, who bear toward Each Other the several relations which those names indicate, and are in that respect distinct from Each Other, and in that alone.

This is the teaching of the Athanasian Creed; viz. that the One Personal God, who is not a logical or physical unity, but a Living Monas, more really one even than an individual man is one---He ("unus" not "unum" because of the inseparability of His Nature and Personality),---He at once is Father, is Son, is Holy Ghost, Each of whom is that One Personal God in the fullness of His Being and Attributes; so that the Father is all that is meant by the word "God," as if we knew nothing of Son, or of Spirit; and in like manner the Son and the Spirit are Each by Himself all that is meant by the word, as if the Other Two were unknown; moreover, that by the word "God" is meant nothing over and above what is meant by "the Father," or by "the Son," or by "the Holy Ghost;" and that the Father is in no sense the Son, nor the Son the Holy Ghost, nor the Holy Ghost the Father. Such is the prerogative of the Divine Infinity, that the One and Single Personal Being, the Almighty Good, is really Three, while He is absolutely One.

(underlineation added)

J. H. Newman, AN ESSAY IN AID OF A GRAMMAR OF ASSENT, with an introduction by Étienne Gilson (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, Image Books, 1955), pp. 111.

<sup>18</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger has pointed to St. Thomas' acceptance of a notion of the "Personal God" which has a markedly Monarchian character:

The turn brought about by Thomas through the separation of the doctrine of the one God and the theological doctrine of the Trinity was more incisive. It led Thomas to consider the formula "God is one Person" legitimate, although it had been considered heretical in the early Church: see S.T.iii<sup>a</sup>, 3, 3, ad 1.

Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," COMMUNIO 17/3 (Fall, 1990) 439-54; n. 12, at 454.

The third question of the TERTIA PARS of St. Thomas' SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, to which Cardinal Ratzinger here refers, is entitled: *Utrum, abstracta personalitate per intellectum, natura (divina) potest assumere (naturam humanam)*. The first objection that St. Thomas proposes to his affirmative answer to this question is as follows:

1. Dictum est enim quod natura convenit assumere ratione personae. Sed quod convenit alicui ratione alicuius, remoto eo, non potest ei convenire: sicut corpus, quod est visibile ratione coloris, sine colore videre non potest. Ergo, abstracta personalitate per intellectum, natura assumere non potest.

St. Thomas's reply to this objection is simple enough:

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, quia in divinis idem est quo est et quod est, quidquid eorum que attribuuntur Deo in abstracto secundum se consideretur, aliis circumscriptis, erit aliquid subsistens; et per consequens persona, cum sit in natura intellectuali. Sicut igitur nunc, positis proprietatibus personalibus in Deo, dicimus tres personas; ita, exclusis proprietatibus personalibus, remanet in consideratione nostra natura divina ut subsistens, et ut persona. Et per hunc modum potest intellegi quod assumat naturam humanam ratione suae subsistentiae vel personalitatis.

St. Thomas's affirmative reply to the *Quaestio* is thus made in the dehistoricized or abstract context provided by his having deliberately prescind from the historical revelation of the Trinity. However, the metaphysical intelligibility of this abstract context is hardly clear, for its supposition, viz., that such rationalization of metaphysical intelligibility is itself finally capable of abstract, nonhistorical coherence, entirely independent of the Father's sending of the Son to give the Spirit, is itself arbitrary, resolving a question which can arise neither within Aristotelianism nor within the Catholic tradition, although for very different reasons: i.e., Aristotelianism is finally a polytheism, unconcerned for a divine *Monas*, while the Catholic theological tradition is adamantly historical, grounded in the his-

It is not clear that this relation of the creature to the Creator, to the *Deus unus*, is to be identified with the contingency assigned the created order, for it is also described as a concrete participation, e.g., as by a created mind in the eternal Mind, as by any creature in *Esse* at the level of its substantial being, although it is difficult to reconcile participation with creation *ex nihilo sui et subjecti* when the metaphysical standing of the creature's dependence upon the Creator is merely nominal: that of logical non-necessity or contingency. Be that as it may, the question is better taken up at the level of the analogy of being, to which we shall proceed. It is enough here to note that the Creator, as Absolute, clearly can have no positive relation to his creation: he cannot be regarded as an observer extrinsic to it. In fact, the absence of any relation of the Creator to the created order requires that the Creator's transcendence be his non-immanence in creation, his absence from it. As *Ipsium Esse Subsistens* he remains a *Deus otiosus*, a divinity whose reality can be expressed in positive terms only when these are countered by an insistence that they are transcended by a yet greater unlikeness: this apophatic emphasis has been given some dogmatic standing. It is well to remember that the kataphatic "naming" of God in Catholic theology is doctrinally, not metaphysically, sustained: it is not a product of metaphysical analysis.<sup>19</sup> A kataphatic natural theology has no such resource: non-contingency, or abstract necessity, has no kataphatic potential. The *Deus unus*, thus understood, is absolutely nonhistorical: his identification as the prime analogate entails the dehistoricization of all reality.

### 1. The analogy of being

Historically, the analogous predication of being begins with the Neoplatonic intuition of the necessarily self-diffusive Absolute, whether represented imaginatively as a source of light that

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torical-sacramental mediation of the risen Christ in such wise that nonhistorical issues cannot arise within that tradition: they invariably pose false problems, to which only false answers can be given: false because nonhistorical.

In short, the Catholic theological tradition, because historically normed by the liturgy, cannot support a discussion of the divinity *qua Monas*, and certainly not a discussion that would abstract from the Trinitarian revelation, for Catholic theology cannot prescind from the historical tradition and retain its theological validity: i.e., remain the expression of a Catholic *fides quaerens intellectum*.

Nonetheless, the supposition of the abstract character of metaphysical intelligibility is native to St. Thomas, for it is the immediate implication of the *propter peccatum, sensu negante* prius of his Christology, which requires that the intelligibility of metaphysics as such --- i.e., the metaphysics of the created order, dealt with in the first part of the *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*--- not be Christocentric. This requirement is merely the corollary of St. Thomas' commitment to a non-Christocentric creation of a natural --- in the sense of ungraced --- order of creation, and a corresponding commitment to a view of accidental grace which can, but need not, be the grace of Christ --- inasmuch as, on Thomist premises, Adam's Original Sin, understood as metaphysically as well as temporally prior to the Incarnation *propter peccatum*, cannot be understood as a rejection of *gratia Christi*, for the Incarnation itself, on this Thomist postulate, cannot be the condition, the metaphysical prius, of creation. Rather, the Incarnation must be itself dependent upon and therefore conditioned by the free event of Original Sin.

The consequent Monarchian thrust of the Thomist metaphysics is evident in the *PARS PRIMA*, whose prime analogate is not Trinitarian and historical but Monarchian and abstract: the *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, a Subsistence who, however masked by the neuter "Ipsum," cannot but be Personal, the One God, who, as we have seen St. Thomas say, "exclusis proprietatibus personalibus, remanet in consideratione nostra natura divina ut subsistens, et ut persona."

<sup>19</sup> DS §806: "quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similitudo notari, quin inter eos major sit dissimilitudo notari." The similitude is revealed, it cannot be inferred.



cannot but illumine the darkness, or as a Good that is *per se* Self-diffusive. This intuition --- which, as an intuition, is prior to all discursive rationality --- cannot but presuppose the reality of its opposite, its limit: one cannot think of the One without thinking of the many; one cannot think of the Good without thinking of evil, or of Being apart from nonbeing. The dualism implicit in this intuition of the Absolute is obvious enough. As light cannot but be overcoming darkness in this imagery, so the relative always resists the Absolute, so the many resists the One; so matter is always resisting Form. Finally, as the Good, the locus of the Forms, is always overcoming evil in its Self-diffusion, so matter is always a demonic principle, always resistant to Form.

Neoplatonism, like Platonism, requires a universal hylemorphism, for it knows nothing of the metaphysical contrarities required by the Aristotelian act-potency analysis although, incongruously, it deploys the Aristotelian logic dependent upon that analysis. For Neoplatonism as for Platonism, matter is perceived as “me-ontic,”<sup>20</sup> as a correlative limit on the One and the Good, on Being *tout court* --- and upon the True and the Beautiful as well. In all its guises, matter is resistant to Unity, Goodness, Being, Truth and Beauty, in such wise as to constitute the sole limiting factor to formal perfection as such. Aristotle’s metaphysics exploits two distinct act-potency polarities: of form and matter, and of accident and substance. The universal hylemorphism knows only form and matter, and of course must understand them in a sense rejected by Aristotle’s refusal to regard matter as a principle of opposition to form: his rationalization of Platonism reduced matter to mere passivity, to a pure potentiality for location in time and space. Aristotelian matter is never, as in Platonism and Neoplatonism, a principle “resistant” to form, and thus is never understood as a limit upon the Absolute. In the first place, it may be doubted that Aristotelianism admits an absolute in the Platonic sense of the One or the Good and, secondly, were there an Aristotelian Absolute, it would be Absolute Substance, *indivisum in se, divisum ab omni alio*, thus Self-enclosed, utterly immanent, not dynamic, and referred to no principle of resistance. As thus absolute, the *Deus unus* can be a prime analogate in only the most abstract, purely logical sense: that of substantial unity.

It is only by relation to the concreteness imposed by its necessary relation to matter that the Neoplatonic Absolute, the object of the fundamental intuition --- the One or Good --- is capable of being named, however apophatically. However, while in the Platonic synthesis, the mythic account of the fatalistic relation of the Good to meontic matter invokes an irrational fall, the rationalization of Plato’s hylemorphism in the Neoplatonic synthesis relies upon logical necessity to account for the form-matter relation rather than upon a factual but irrational fatality, the Platonic fall of Form into matter. Neoplatonism knows no Fall, no fatality: it locks being into an inexorable necessity and, reductively, into a pantheism.

The Neoplatonic appeal to the rational necessity relating unlimited Being to limited beings (the *bonum diffusum sui* principle) grounds the analogy between the Absolute and the relative in

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<sup>20</sup> The term “me-ontic” is used here in the sense given it by Paul Tillich, as distinguishing relative from absolute (ouk-ontic) non-being.

Neoplatonism.<sup>21</sup> It grounds as well St. Thomas' adaptation of the Neoplatonic analogy of being to his act-potency epistemology, itself dependent upon his adaptation of Aristotle's metaphysical analysis. The relation between the Neoplatonic and the Thomist analogy of being is rather obscure: we have seen that Neoplatonism applies an incongruous Aristotelian logic to a hylemorphic metaphysics, while St. Thomas' exclusive use of the *esse-essentia* polarity as the basis of the analogy imposes hylemorphic implications upon the analogy which cannot here be developed. The conflicting accounts offered by studies of the analogy of being --- a subject to which St. Thomas did not devote much attention --- point to tensions within Thomist analogy and the metaphysics grounding it that have never been resolved.<sup>22</sup>

The elements of the Thomist doctrine of the analogy are however quite clear. For St. Thomas, the analogy of being is naturally knowable: it is integral with his epistemology, which supposes a prime analogate of unity, truth, goodness, and so, of being as such. For St. Thomas, this Prime Analogate can only be the Creator God, and consequently the Thomist understanding of the analogy of being entails a natural analogical knowledge of God, whose existence is discursively known by inference from the secondary analogates constituting the created order of being. The criticism made by Karl Barth of this natural, i.e., logically necessary, inference of the existence of God --- summarily that it is a blasphemous arrogation to man of an ungraced access to God --- is well-known. Barth does not appear ever to have departed from his original conviction that the analogy of being, thus rationalized, is at once indispensable to Catholic doctrine and the invention of the anti-Christ.<sup>23</sup> As "natural," the Thomist analogy of being, insofar as it grounds our knowledge of God, must be grounded in the naturally-known contingency of creation, which in turn is used to ground the *esse-essence* relation that is St. Thomas' addition to, and partial conversion of, the Aristotelian act-potency analysis. The question then arises whether the analogy, so grounded, can escape concluding to the rationally necessary knowledge of God that Barth has criticized.

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<sup>21</sup> M. D. Chenu, O.P., "The Platonisms of the Twelfth Century," *NATURE, MAN AND SOCIETY IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY. Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, with a Preface by Étienne Gilson; ed. and tr. by Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press: A Midway Reprint: 1983<sup>1957</sup>) 49-98 at 72-79.

<sup>22</sup> On this see Joyce A. Little, *TOWARD A THOMIST METHODOLOGY*; ser. Toronto Studies in Theology, 34 (Lewiston, NY; Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988). Prof. Little has pointed out the irreconcilable interpretations of the analogy underlying the "thin essence" vs. "thick essence" controversy dividing Thomist metaphysicians.

<sup>23</sup> This is pointed out by Fergus Kerr in a recent study, *AFTER AQUINAS: Versions of Thomism* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK, Blackwell, 2002), at 35-37. Barth's criticism of the analogy of being is conveniently available in his study of Anselm, *FIDES QUAERENS INTELLECTUM. Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme*; tr. Ian W. Robertson (Richmond, VA: The John Knox Press, 1960). His objection to the analogy of being is not to the assertion of an analogy between creature and Creator, but to the Thomist supposition of a purely rational or "natural" foundation of our analogical knowledge of God. For Barth, the analogous knowledge of God, insofar as valid, bears upon the free truth of the faith, which can only be gift: he understands St. Thomas to have reduced it to an immanent necessity of thought.

The natural created order, the universe of being that, in St. Thomas' epistemology, we understand precisely and only insofar as our bodily experience of it is illumined by the agent intellect, is necessarily related to the Creator in the sense that, apart from that relation, the created universe could not exist, for its contingency is a relation of total metaphysical dependence upon the Creator: St. Thomas is very clear on this point. For St. Thomas, contingency grounds the *esse-essentia* relation constituting all creatures. The analogy requires that the *Deus unus* be *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, and that creatures be composite: i.e., that their *esse* be *relative* to their *essentia* in the composition of *esse* and *essentia* that is their substantial being, but that their *esse*, because relative within this composite to their *essentia*, be never identified with their *essentia*. In the Creator God, *Esse* and *Essentia* simply identify, but only in the sense that as Pure Act, the *Deus unus* is not properly named *Ipsium Essentia Subsistens*, for within the Thomist metaphysics, essence connotes potency, not act. It is true that in God they are identical, but *Ipsium Esse Subsistens* conveys more adequately the Pure Act that is the divine Substance, the *Deus unus*, the Creator.

The basic critical question is then whether contingency, in the sense of a negation of the necessary existence of creatures, thus understood as an entirely abstract, entirely negative attribute, entirely without conceptual content, can in fact ground the concrete *esse-essentia* relation indispensable to the metaphysics of created substance, and therefore indispensable to the analogy of being. That it cannot is inescapable.

For St. Thomas, contingency grounds what von Balthasar has named the "Ontological Difference" between God and what is not God; the attribution of contingency to creatures can ground that distinction of creatures from their Creator only when the equation of their creation, which is to say, their contingency, with their substantial metaphysical contingency, is presupposed. Were it not presupposed, there would be nothing concrete in "contingency" that could ground the highly concrete "Ontological Difference" between the Creator and the created order of being. Gilson, in the late thirties, argued, against all the idealist perversions of philosophy, that "on a painted nail one can hang only a painted hat."<sup>24</sup> That argument appears to be quite as dispositive of the idealism implicit in a metaphysics grounded on a nonhistorical abstraction such as contingency. One cannot infer from abstract contingency, a mere negation of the necessity of the creature's existence, a positive metaphysical standing of ontological dependence. To do so would be to leap from the ideal to the concrete, but these simply exclude each other: there is no basis in the creatures' mere contingency for an inference that would link them to a Creator upon whom they would be dependent. Briefly, contingency does not say dependency unless creation

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<sup>24</sup> Étienne Gilson, in *RÉALISME MÉTHODIQUE* (Paris: Téqui, 1936) and *RÉALISME THOMISTE ET CRITIQUE DE LA CON-NAISSANCE* (Paris: Vrin, 1939) has pointed out long since the futility of trying by means of an immanentist logic to argue oneself out of that immanence. Although at the time he was not sufficiently conscious of the theological foundation for his insistence upon dogmatic realism, Gilson's criticism of the rationalism of "transcendental Thomism" stands.

is presupposed. St. Thomas here begs the question; he is forced to do so by his ‘naturalization’ of creation.

This consideration pushes further the question of the nature of the “Ontological Difference” between God and what is not God. Von Balthasar distinguishes between theists who maintain this “Difference,” and those who do not and thereby are pantheists at best.<sup>25</sup> The issue before us may be thus stated: given *ex hypothesi* an intellectual creature’s necessary knowledge of its utter dependence upon the Creator, can the Creator’s freedom to create be given metaphysical standing: i.e., can it be made intelligible from the standpoint of a contingently created mind, or is the dogmatic fact of ontological dependence, and thus of ontological difference, given a merely nominal standing, lacking a metaphysical account? More succinctly put, can the Creator’s freedom be inferred from the creature’s contingency? Inasmuch as contingency is mere non-impossibility, or abstract possibility, such an inference can find no concrete justification, while the attribution of freedom to the Absolute is equivalently the attribution of omnipotence, which we have seen to be unable to establish a free relation to created reality. Consequently an analogous understanding of God, insofar as grounded in the contingency of creation, cannot but tend to a logically necessary creation and thus to a pantheism, insofar as self-consistent. We find echoes of this pantheism cropping up in Neoplatonizing Christian circles from the time of Origen onward: John Scotus Eriugena provides an early example in the West.

It is evident that this pantheistic consequence has been rejected by the Catholic speculative tradition, and this for clearly dogmatic reasons; the Catholic faith in the One God is faith in the Creator of heaven and earth. Faith in a divine creation *ex nihilo*, inherited from the Old Testament, is unwavering in the New Testament, where it is linked specifically (Prologue to John’s Gospel, Phil 2:5-12, Col 1:15) to Jesus the Christ: creation is in him, who is himself the Beginning, the Alpha as well as the Omega. From within the ecclesial mediation of this liturgical-doctrinal tradition, the meaning of creation, both as active and as passive, is vastly richer, and it is this plenitude that has entered into, and enriched, the abstract poverty of a natural or “contingent” creation.

Today it may easily be perceived as unfortunate at best that St. Thomas was so wedded to the conviction that creation is ungraced that the bulk of the scripturally-grounded doctrinal tradition of Christocentrism eluded him.<sup>26</sup> For instance, he read the clear Pauline references to creation in

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<sup>25</sup> THE GLORY OF THE LORD: A THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS. Vol. V: THE REALM OF METAPHYSICS IN THE MODERN AGE. Translated by Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil C.R.V., John Seward and Rowan Williams. Edited by Brian McNeil C.R.V. and John Riches. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1991), 619.

<sup>26</sup> St. Thomas appears to have had an intimation of this incongruity: there are instances in the later part of the *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*, in which he recognized the ontological primacy of Christ to creation --- an insight that seems never to have entered into his theological synthesis, and one that plays no part in the Thomism of the schools):

Nam ante statum peccati homo habuit explicitam fidem de incarnatione secundum quod ordinabatur ad consummationem gloriae, non autem secundum quod ordinabatur ad liberationem a peccato per passionem et resurrectionem, quia homo non fuit praescius peccati futuri. Videtur autem incarnationem Christi praescius fuisse per hoc quod dixit *Propter hoc relinquet*

Jesus or in the Christ as mere accommodation, i.e., as appropriate metaphorical references to the role of the “immanent Son” in creation, which he understood to be a work “ad extra,” one that, for St. Thomas, denotes an extrinsic work of the One God in which the Personal distinctions in the Trinity have no role, and to which the Father’s Mission of the Son to give the Spirit is irrelevant, therefore, a work to which the redemption achieved on the Cross and on the Altar is comparably irrelevant, and in which the role of nature is thus pre-eminent as to leave in some confusion the work of grace.

This confusion is particularly evident in the much-bruited distinctions between faith and reason, and between faith-informed morality and conformity to the natural law. Further, this powerful emphasis upon the priority of the natural order of explanation forces the “propter peccatum” Christology, which supposes that, in the absence of the Fall, there would have been no Incarnation of the Son. This mistake forces insupportable incongruities upon theological speculation: e.g., the Immaculate Conception of our Lady is notably inconsistent with it, as is the unity of the Two Testaments.

## 2. The natural knowledge of God

The “natural” knowledge of God within the ungraced creation is of course analogous, a knowledge that St. Thomas understands to be ungraced. Thus it can only be a necessary knowledge: within a universe whose intrinsic intelligibility is determined by necessary causes, there is no room for freedom. Thomists are accustomed to mix the analytical or metaphysical sense of “nature” with the practical or historical sense. We may illustrate by reference to the well-known maxim, “Grace perfects nature.” This arose in the patristic period, long before the “reception of Aristotelianism” in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and long before its theological exploitation by St. Thomas. The maxim has a simple historical sense: “grace,” usually identified with the grace of conversion, whether with a view to Baptism or to Penance, is a benefit *ad salutem* to whomever receives it, in the sense that it is a fulfillment of the concrete human existence of the convert, i.e., of his “nature.” We shall see that John Paul II has recently returned to this historical usage of “nature” in *Veritatis splendor*.

However, in theological discussion of nature and grace prompted by the aforesaid maxim, the critical systematic or metaphysical problems arise of the tendency to deal with the graced, concretely historical human situation as though its speculative prius were the Aristotelian, analytically dehistoricized meaning of nature, whose immanently necessary intelligibility is arrived at by an act-potency analysis that reduces the human condition to that of a “rational animal,” and thereby reduces morality to the immanently necessary rationality that is “natural.” Clearly

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*homo patrem et matrem et adhaerebit uxori suae ut habetur Gen 2,24, et hoc Apostolus ad Eph 5,32 dicit sacramentum magnum esse in Christo et Ecclesia; quod quidem sacramentum non est credibile primum hominem ignorasse.*

ST II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup> q. 2, a. 7.

Such passages must be balanced against St. Thomas' repeated assertions of a preference for a *propter peccatum* Christology: cf. ST III<sup>a</sup>, q. 1, a. 3, c.; *ibid.*, q. 1, a. 5, c.

enough, St. Thomas and his followers do not thus always limit themselves; nonetheless, the stress of, e.g., the Thomist moral theologians upon obedient conformity to eternal law rather than upon personal initiative and personal responsibility, provides a striking, highly pertinent illustration of the problems posed by the rationalist element in the Thomist schools, whether theological or philosophical.

The insertion of the analytical or deterministic reading of “nature” into the maxim must impose an accidental standing on grace, whose relation to “nature” is then that of the subordination of an accident to its correlative substance or “nature” as the source of its actuality, and which is then unable to transcend the immanent rationality of that potentiality: rational animality. This is not the place to deal with the consequent dilemmas: they are summed up in the impossibility of reducing free human historicity to categories of necessity. The entire Catholic tradition insists upon the free responsibility of all human beings to know God. There is no hint whatever in the tradition that this is other than a free because moral knowledge, a knowledge that only as moral is perfective of the human mind, of the human condition across the board, and whose final orientation is quite simply the kingdom of God: there is no ungraced element in this knowledge.

One should here recall that Vatican I’s definition of our natural knowledge of God, taken up in *Humani generis*, relies upon the authority of Rom 1, not of St. Thomas. Only an obstinate eisegesis can suppose St. Paul’s strictures in Rom 1:15ff. on violations of natural morality to refer to an “ungraced” human situation.<sup>27</sup> “Natural,” in its conciliar usage, is a historical term: it means native to, or inborn in, but in any case universal to the fallen human condition. In this historical use of the word, the “natural” is concretely universal, but that universality is not taught by the Church to be implicit in abstract human nature as philosophically conceived. The Church does not teach philosophy --- or theology. Neither Vatican I’s *Dei Filius* nor *Humani generis* offers any basis for supposing the concrete, universally distributed human condition, say that of one of the Cro-Magnon cultures, to be ungraced. One need not read conciliar documents through Thomist glasses and, in fact, one is barred from doing so: John Paul II has repeatedly rejected the heretofore common supposition that Thomism has some sort of dogmatic or doctrinal authority in Catholic theology.<sup>28</sup> The Pope indeed honors St. Thomas, but his doctrine departs freely from St. Thomas’ doctrine of “nature.”

Because St. Thomas understood the capacity to know God to be implicit in human intellectuality as such, he could look upon a failure to affirm the existence of God only as a failure to be rational, and hence to be moral on at least the material level. This is the basis of the proofs for

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<sup>27</sup> In *METHOD IN THEOLOGY* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), Bernard Lonergan attempted to avoid this result; I have discussed the matter in "Methodological Critique of Lonergan's Theological Method," *THE THOMIST* 50 (Jan., 1986) 28-65.

<sup>28</sup> For an examination of the normative academic standing of the Thomist theology from its warranting by Leo XIII to the rejection of any preferred Catholic theology by John Paul II, see José Pereira, "Thomism and the Magisterium: from *Aeterni Patris* to *Veritatis splendor*," *LOGOS* 5:3 (Summer, 2002) 147-183.

the existence of God by way of the analogy of being which so exercised Karl Barth over fifty years ago as, from a quite different viewpoint, it had preoccupied Kant at the close of the eighteenth century. Barth knew, as Paul had taught, and as, following Paul, the patristic tradition knew, that we have no ungraced access to God. In 529 the second Provincial Council of Orange, which later received papal ratification and ecumenical standing, taught as Augustine had taught, that without grace one can do nothing.<sup>29</sup>

Much theological confusion, particularly in the realm of the natural knowledge of God, and of the natural knowledge of the moral law, has arisen out of the facile identification of the abstract Thomist understanding of “nature” with the historical, highly concrete understanding of “nature” that we find in the patristic and early medieval tradition, resting on the scriptural use of the term, as by St. Paul in Romans. Because “grace” always bespeaks moral freedom, including a moral freedom to refuse to recognize a known truth, one must suppose an ungraced or natural knowledge of God to be a deterministic one, on the Aristotelian pattern.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. The natural law and natural morality

“Natural” moral freedom is a misnomer: it is quite evident that in the ungraced creation, there is no room for moral freedom. While St. Thomas did not of course accept this inference, as his followers do not, it is not without impact in the moral law tradition. In fact, its influence underlies the quandary now confronting Catholic moral theology, dividing it between dissenting relativists of one sort or another on the one hand, and orthodox upholders of the Catholic moral tradition who have not developed an adequately systematic --- i.e., metaphysical --- response to the challenge of the relativists as sharply posed by Karl Rahner.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> DS §§373-395, esp. Canon 6, §376.

<sup>30</sup> Werner Jaeger, in *ARISTOTLE: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*; tr. with the author's corrections and additions by Richard Robinson; second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), has detailed the departure of Aristotle from the religious a priorism of the Platonic *eros*, but Aristotle's own rational a priorism comparably posited an absolute intelligence, the intellect as pure act, *intellectus agens*. It is disputed among scholars whether Aristotle understood this absolute to be divine: cf. David Knowles, *THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIEVAL THOUGHT*, at 9; cf. 209, where Knowles cites W. K. C. Guthrie "who, almost alone among present-day Aristotelian scholars, holds that the "agent intellect is the prime mover, Aristotle's God"; however Jaeger, in *THE THEOLOGY OF THE EARLY GREEK PHILOSOPHERS: The Gifford Lectures*, 1936; tr. Edward S. Robinson (London: The Clarendon Press of the Oxford University Press, 1948)., at 87, and especially in *ARISTOTLE*, at 380 and 387, appears to agree with Guthrie on this point, although they are otherwise at odds as regards the prime mover: see W. K. C. Guthrie, "Development of Aristotle's Theology," *CLASSICAL QUARTERLY* 27 (1933) 162-171. For a more general statement, see W. Jaeger, "The Greek Ideas of Immortality: The Ingersoll Lecture for 1958," *HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW* 52/3 (June, 1959), 135-47.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Rahner, in "On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethics," *THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS* II, 217-234, pointed out the basic dilemma: how to apply a nonhistorical, abstract moral criterion to a concrete act whose significance, as concrete, unique, and free, cannot identify with the abstract content of a moral law. The virtue of prudence (*phronesis*) is intended to mediate between the moral norm and the moral decision, but what authority can it claim? Reliance upon the virtuous man's connaturality with virtue only begs the question.

The tension between conformity to a “natural” criterion of morality and the historical moral responsibility of the Christian is apparent also in St. Thomas’ notion of morality as conformity to natural law. The criterion of morality thus understood is nonhistorical, the “eternal law,” identified with the divine intellect, of which the human mind is an image whose imaging is rational decision or judgment. The criterion of this rationality is not historical, but eternal, timeless, therefore abstract. In these circumstances, morality is reduced to mere obedience, without room for the exercise of personal responsibility for a free future. This failure is responsible for the dilemma now paralyzing Catholic moral theology, whose exponents have thus far failed to find a valid historical norm for moral conduct. John Paul II stressed this failure in *Veritatis splendor* (1993), a document that strongly suggests the Eucharistic foundation of morality as such.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> VERITATIS SPLENDOR’S insistent references to the Church’s sacramental worship can hardly be otherwise understood:

**§21 (Pp. 35-36)** *Following Christ* is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of his being. Being a follower of Christ means *becoming conformed to him* who became a servant even to giving himself on the Cross (cf. *Phil* 2:5-8). Christ dwells by faith in the heart of the believer (cf. *Eph* 3:17), and thus the disciple is conformed to the Lord. This is the effect of grace, of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Having become one with Christ, the Christian *becomes a member of his Body which is the Church* (cf. *1 Cor* 12:13,27). By the work of the Spirit, Baptism radically configures the faithful to Christ in the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection; it “clothes him” in Christ (cf. *Gal* 3:27): “Let us rejoice and give thanks,” exclaims Saint Augustine speaking to the baptized, “for we have become not only Christians, but Christ (...). Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ!” Having died to sin, those who are baptized receive new life (cf. *Rom* 6:3-11): alive for God in Christ Jesus, they are called to walk by the Spirit and to manifest the Spirit’s fruits in their lives (cf. *Gal* 5:16-25). Sharing in the Eucharist, the sacrament of the New Covenant (cf. *1 Cor* 11:23-29), is the culmination of our assimilation to Christ, the source of “eternal life” (cf. *Jn* 6:51-58), the source and power of that complete gift of self, which Jesus--according to the testimony handed on by Paul--commands us to commemorate in liturgy and in life: “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (*1 Cor* 11:26).

**§107 (Pp. 158-160)** “*Evangelization*”--and therefore the “new evangelization”--*also involves the proclamation and presentation of morality*. Jesus himself, even as he preached the Kingdom of God and its saving love, called people to faith and conversion (cf. *Mk* 1:15). And when Peter, with the other Apostles, proclaimed the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, he held out a new life to be lived, a “way” to be followed, for those who would be disciples of the Risen One (cf. *Acts* 2:37-41; 3:17-20).

Just as it does in proclaiming the truths of faith, and even more so in presenting the foundations and content of Christian morality, the new evangelization will show its authenticity and unleash all its missionary force when it is carried out through the gift not only of the word proclaimed but also of the word lived. In particular, the *life of holiness* which is resplendent in so many members of the People of God, humble and often unseen, constitutes the simplest and most attractive way to perceive at once the beauty of truth, the liberating force of God’s love, and the value of unconditional fidelity to all the demands of the Lord’s law, even in the most difficult situations. For this reason, the Church, as a wise teacher of morality, has always invited believers to seek and to find in the Saints, and above all in the Virgin Mother of God “full of grace” and “all-holy”, the model, the strength and the joy needed to live a life in accordance with God’s commandments and the Beatitudes of the Gospel.

The lives of the saints, as a reflection of the goodness of God--the One who “alone is good”--constitute not only a genuine profession of faith and an incentive for sharing it with others, but also a glorification of God and his infinite holiness. The life of holiness thus brings to full expression and effectiveness the threefold and unitary *munus propheticum, sacerdotale et regale* which every Christian receives as a gift by being born again “of water and the Spirit” (*Jn* 3:5) in Baptism. His moral life has the value of a “spiritual worship” (*Rom* 12:1; cf. *Phil* 3:3), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist: by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ’s self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds. In the moral life the Christian’s royal service is also made evident and effective: with the help of grace, the more one obeys the new law of the Holy Spirit, the more one grows in the freedom to which he or she is called by the service of truth, charity and justice.



Even now, a decade after its publication, that guidance is still being ignored, and the dilemma unresolved. The necessity for a truly historical norm for historical morality cannot be gainsaid, but the historical norm for Catholic morality cannot be empirical, for the empirical data is always incomplete, and cannot found a universal negative norm, as the situationists and proportionalists have well understood; hence their dissent to the Catholic moral tradition, and their preference for merely contingent norms, lacking the intrinsic free unity of moral truth, and therefore extrinsically imposed: it is not coincidental that Western society finds its liberties sinking without trace in a sea of political correctness. I have argued elsewhere, relying on the historicity of Catholic sacramental realism, that the only possible historical norm is that which grounds all life in the Church: the Eucharistic institution of the New Covenant, the One Flesh of Christ and the Church, the free unity that alone can undergird free morality: i.e., that can ground the covenantal fidelity that is the radical moral law, the fidelity inseparable from the worship of the Church.

It is evident enough that a morality which would not be dehistoricized by an ideal criterion, nor pragmatized by an empirical criterion, such as submission to a majority vote, can have no other historically objective criterion than the Church's sacramental worship. This alone is the source of "natural law." In *Veritatis splendor*, the Pope recognized this need for a historical moral criterion in his redefinition of "nature" as historical: for John Paul II, the natural law is founded on human nature understood as that which was created good in the Beginning (i.e., created in Christ; cf. Col 1:17), which fell in the first Adam, was redeemed in the second, and in Him is raised to the right hand of the Father. This criterion alone suffices, but it has only a Eucharistic objectivity: it is not an abstraction, nor an empirically available reality. Consequently, conformity to it is free, a moral act, equivalent to covenantal fidelity. To date, no Thomist moralist has grasped the necessity for a historical morality, one concerned for the morality of free acts, although it should be obvious that a nonhistorical morality is impossible.

The fashionable alternatives to the Catholic tradition of historical moral freedom and responsibility all invoke the institutions of a rationalized morality inimical to the Catholic understanding of personal moral freedom. Its replacement by conformity to the will of a secular elite rather than to the Covenant instituted by Christ on the Cross has been proceeding apace for three decades.<sup>33</sup> This reduction of morality to conformism is only a return to the dehistoricized morality of paganism: a flight from history, from a free and unpredictable future to a utopia of absolute irresponsibility, wherein the coerced inculcation of servile terror replaces the free, liturgical appropriation of Christian virtue. The secularization of morality differs from the abstract, con-

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<sup>33</sup> See Charles Curran, "Cooperation: Toward a Revision of the Concept and its Application," *LINACRE QUARTERLY* 41 (August, 1974) 57-69, wherein Fr. Curran turns the content of morality over to a political process, reasoning that what is "natural" is per se public, as open to legislative as to magisterial decision: as between the two, he prefers the former. A reply to this reductionism appeared as "Church, State, and Charles Curran," *COMMUNIO* 4 (Summer, 1977) 112-136. A few years later Curran urged the secularization of academic freedom in the Catholic university, a project now effectively realized, lacking for its full implementation only the open abdication by Catholic institutions of higher education of all concern for Catholic education as such: see Charles Curran, "Academic Freedom: The Catholic University and Catholic Theologians," *CATHOLIC MIND* 78/1 (February, 1980), 1-26.

formist morality implicit in a contingent creation only by its deification of abstract humanity, and the consequent political program for the abolition of man in the concrete against which C. S. Lewis warned a wartime radio audience more than sixty years ago. Obviously, the natural law tradition relied far more on the Ten Commandments than upon the rationalization of moral law. Nonetheless, a morality of conformity to natural reason is a thin brew when compared to the richness and depth of a liturgically mediated covenantal fidelity.

#### D. Grace as the accidental modification of natural (ungraced) creation

This view of grace as accident invokes the substance-accident relation. Its corollary, the identification of “nature” (creation as ungraced) as “substance” makes “nature” to be the prior condition of possibility of all its accidents.

It is necessary to be clear as to the kind of accident we have in view: grace cannot be a proper accident, one found wherever man is found, a reality as inseparable from his definition as, e.g., his intellect is. Grace, simply as gratuitous, is evidently not intrinsic to man as man, not something indispensable to his intelligibility: it comes from outside him, so to speak: better, it transcends him as freedom transcends necessity. Generally, grace is not understood by Thomists, as it was not by St. Thomas or by his master, St. Augustine, to be universally granted: this appears to be the consequence of the Greek identification of universality with necessity: it is thus that “nature” was understood to be ungraced. This lack of grace may be understood historically, as describing all mankind outside of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and hence as unaware of a historical revelation and a need to respond to it, or it may be read nonhistorically as inherent in the meaning of nature. The patristic reading of the relation of nature to grace is in the main historical: natural man is man as unconverted to the faith of the Church, whether proleptically as in Judaism, or fully, as in the baptized Christian. However, within the Thomist analysis, nature is distinct from and devoid of grace as a matter of definition. St. Thomas in his last few years came to recognize that the “natural” man, spontaneously infidel in his fallenness, is nonetheless called to Christ wherever found, but St. Thomas died too soon for this insight to be integrated into his theological metaphysics.

Consequently, the Thomist consideration of grace as accidental requires that grace be less than universally distributed. Grace thus becomes a predicamental accident in the order of metaphysics. Under this consideration, grace underwent a considerable subdivision. Its categories will not be pursued here. The less-than-universal grace here in view is simply that grace which is salvific, that unmerited, purely gratuitous perfection in man as historical whereby here and now he is freely pleasing to God.

The obvious metaphysical impossibility of understanding the mere absence of salvific grace as the prior possibility of, or the potentiality for, grace has prompted the attribution to the Tho-

mist “nature” of an “obediential potency” for grace.<sup>34</sup> Because no metaphysical account of this attribution, which would explain the universality of this “potentiality” as well as its gratuity or non-gratuity, has ever been provided, its reality must remain nominal merely, an avoidance rather than a resolution of the basic systematic or metaphysical problem of the relation of “nature” to “grace.”<sup>35</sup>

This view of grace further fails to provide any account of its relation to the redemption worked by Jesus the Christ; it is *gratia Dei*, not *gratia Christi*. While it is not difficult to find passages in St. Thomas wherein he recognizes the graced relation of the first Adam to the Christ, there has been no felt need generally within the Thomist theology of grace to integrate the prelapsarian or primordial condition of man with the Mission of the Son to give the Spirit.

If grace as accidental is nonetheless *gratia Christi*, then Christ, the unique source of accidental grace, must himself be accidental to the created order. Thomas chose to regard the mission of the Son as having taken place “on account of sin” (*propter peccatum*), while acknowledging that not all agree. He understands this “propter” systematically, i.e., *in sensu negante*: apart from original sin, the Father would not have sent the Son to give the Spirit. It is at least arguable that

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<sup>34</sup> This problem arose for St. Thomas in the context of accounting for the sinfulness inherent in a witting refusal of conversion to faith in Christ. His solution was to return to the Augustinian postulate of a “trahi a Deo” or “instinctus fidei,” (it was variously named) which had to be universally distributed in the non-Christian as in the Christian world if it were to be a solution to the problem posed.

The *trahi a Deo* is an Augustinian coinage, first used in Augustine’s commentary on the Eucharistic passages in Jn 6; see IN TRACT. JO. 26, 4 (CCHR.SL 36:261-262); this passage is translated by James O’Connor in THE HIDDEN MANNA: A Theology of the Eucharist (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988) at 2. The “trahi” underlies the universal possibility of faith in Christ; only thus could it account for the sinfulness of infidelity. Clearly, the “trahi” is a gift “ad salutem” for without it faith is impossible. It must then be grace, and a universally distributed grace, one as universal as creation: wherever man is found, he is found capable of fidelity to Christ. The consequent universality of grace is incompatible with St. Thomas’ supposition that grace is a metaphysical accident, and thus is incompatible with the corollary, that creation is substantially ungraced.

For the history of this development in St. Thomas’ thought, see Robert Aubert, LE PROBLÈME DE L’ACTE DE FOI: Données traditionnelles et controverses récentes, 3<sup>e</sup> édition (Louvain: E. Warny, 1958), 43-71, esp. 65ff. Aubert’s discussion refers particularly to ST II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 2, a. 9, ad 3, to q. 5, a.1; q. 8, a.4, ad 3; to q. 10, a. 1, ad 1, to COMM. IN IOANN. V, 6, 8-9; XV, 5, 4, and to QUODL. II, a. 6, ad 1 & ad 3. The Thomist *trahi a Deo* is also the subject of Max Seckler’s doctoral dissertation, INSTINKT UND GLAUBENSWILLE NACH THOMAS VON AQUIN (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1961), which avoids the theologically inescapable question of whether the *trahi* is grace or nature. Edward Schillebeeckx favorably reviewed this dissertation, particularly approving its author’s decision to avoid a decision on the crucial issue of whether the *trahi* be reckoned nature or grace. See REVELATION AND THEOLOGY II, ser. Theological Soundings; tr. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), at 32-54.

<sup>35</sup> One may be reminded in this connection of Rahner’s equivalent failure to provide a metaphysical or theologically systematic account of the “supernatural existential” to which his phenomenological inquiries led him, for it has obvious parallels with the earlier recourse of Thomist theologians to the metaphysically impossible notion of an “obediential potency” that would be neither grace nor nature. Like Seckler and Schillebeeckx, Rahner saw that the metaphysical inquiry into his “supernatural existential” would either founder on the a priori postulate of the Thomist metaphysics requiring that grace be the accidental modification of an ungraced creation or, refusing that impasse, would be require a restatement of the Thomist metaphysics of grace as substantial. Neither alternative was attractive.

the Fathers and even Anselm of Bec read it otherwise: viz., as *sensu aiente*, as not excluding the Mission of the Son to an unfallen world. That alone, after all, permits the Immaculate Conception to be *gratia Christi*.

In any case, Original Sin, as a free moral event, is clearly not a necessity; it may then be argued that its remedy, the Mission of the Son to give the Spirit, must also be comparably dissociate from creation, and thus not integral with creation, not the pre-condition of creation. On this reasoning, it becomes impossible to understand the dependence of all the fallen creation upon the redemption worked by Jesus the Christ, for creation, and the Fall, is independent of him, and the remedy that he brings must in some sense be adventitious.

The Fall becomes incomprehensible: it must be a fall from grace, hence from the grace of Christ, yet no theological (metaphysical) account of the priority of the Christ to the Fall is possible when he is accidental to creation, is sent simply on account of sin, and therefore has no primordial immanence in creation which would bear upon the Original Sin and Fall. This is to read the Prologue and the account of the kenosis of Jesus in Phil 2:5-2 through the dehistoricizing lens of the Thomist metaphysics. Nonetheless, the only reading of those passages that is consistent with the Symbol of Chalcedon is that which understands them to speak not of an “immanent Son” who would be the nonhistorical subject of Jn 1:14, but of Jesus the Christ, the Alpha and the Omega. In the Prologue, the Logos is the Son of God, Jesus the Christ, one and the same Son, eternally begotten of the Father, conceived in fallen history by the Immaculate second Eve, Mary who became the *Theotokos* in her free response to the Annunciation of her transcendent destiny. The identical doctrine is found in Phil 2:5-12, where it is simply “Jesus” who is the subject of the kenotic “becoming flesh.” Paul speaks rather of his assuming the “form of a slave,” a more graphic statement of the same mystery.

A major and in fact climactic difficulty arises when, as is inescapable, one comes to distinguish, as is necessary, between the contingency of creation *ex nihilo* and the gratuity of the Incarnation, for St. Thomas uses the *esse-essentia* analysis to account for both. The result is that their *ex nihilo* standings are systematically indistinguishable, only nominally distinct. St. Thomas’ understanding of the Incarnation as “propter peccatum” recites an *ex nihilo* contingency matching that of the creation *ex nihilo*. As a result one cannot distinguish methodologically --- i.e., theologically, which is to say systematically and therefore metaphysically --- between the mystery of grace and the mystery of iniquity. Those distinctions are barred by the abstract reading of the *esse-essentia* relation required by a natural creation. They are identified systematically, but were the Incarnation to control the meaning of the *esse-essentia* relation, grace would become substantial, not accidental, for the *esse-essentia* analysis is of substance, not accident. We cannot pursue the matter here.

## II: The graced creation in Christ

The scriptural warrant for creation in Christ is well known: it has been the foundation of much of the recent teaching of John Paul II, especially in *Veritatis splendor*, in *Fides et Ratio*, and in his *Letter to Families*. From the beginning of his pontificate, John Paul II has been concerned with creation in a “natural” context only in the terms set for the graced, historical criterion of the natural law in *Veritatis splendor*. We have already stressed that for him, “human nature” is man as created good “in the Beginning” (which Beginning he identifies with Jesus the Christ, as in Col 1:17), a creation fallen in the first Adam, redeemed in the second Adam and, in him, raised to the right hand of the Father. Thus, he simply does not accept the problematic posed by St. Thomas’ postulate of an ungraced creation.

The Pope’s magisterial documents are not to be understood as the expression of his theological opinions: he invokes no systematic context whatever, for all his teaching is liturgically normed, a function of his exercise of the radically liturgical responsibility that is his as the successor of Peter, to whom our Lord said: “Feed my sheep; Tend my lambs; Feed my sheep.” These documents, like all those of his pontificate, are products of his teaching office, which is the proclamation of doctrine, not of theology. Obviously however, they have a very great theological import, for their doctrine is forcing a renewal of systematic theology. John Paul II’s teaching stresses the concrete universality of the grace of Christ, in and from “the Beginning.” The created order is the order of salvation history: no moment, not part of the creation is ungraced, for it is the product of the Father’s sending of the Son to give the Spirit, a Mission completed by the Son’s institution, upon the Cross and the Altar, of the New Covenant, the One Flesh of Christ and his Church in which the sinful rejection of nuptial unity by Adam and Eve is transcended by the nuptial union of the second Adam and the second Eve, and through this, all things are made new, *in signo, in sacramento*, for the restored unity of creation has the freedom of the One Flesh, which cannot be imposed. Therefore, the first work of the Redemption is the freeing of all mankind from the prison in which the Original Sin had enclosed them, by depriving them of the only unity that has objective reality in history, that unity which is free, and as free is nuptially ordered, freely to be appropriated.

This appropriation is sacramental, achieved *in ecclesia*; it is our entry into the salvific significance of history as redeemed, into the free obligation of nuptial fidelity, which in a fallen world is crucifying. The alternative to its free appropriation is to remain in the “flesh,” imprisoned within our own immanence, seeking vainly a unity which by definition it has definitively lost and cannot regain: it is by this loss that we are flesh, and to flesh must return. On all this Paul is eloquent; there is no need to repeat him here.

The theological task is then to rehistoricize the metaphysical project. Inescapably, the task of Catholic metaphysics is as Anselm of Bec described it, *fides quaerens intellectum*. A more methodologically conscious age than his would understand the task thus stated to require the theoretical statement of that faith-founded and faith-driven *quaerens intellectum*, a statement

that, to remain theological, must remain hypothetical, must remain a question directed to the historical faith mediated in and by the Church's liturgy as a dimension of personal worship. Theology is not and cannot be an assertion of the faith: rather, it is an expression of a continuing personal quest for a further grasp of its finally incomprehensible but historically intelligible mystery, which the theologian cannot enclose in his thought, but which he can affirm in faith and, in that affirmation, cannot but seek further to understand, for the free unity of its Mystery invites him always to turn away from the confusion proper to his flesh, whose only resolution is the One Flesh of the New Covenant, whose historicity is its Eucharistic representation.

#### A. Conversion to the historicity of being: the historical prime analogate

Our hypothesis requires a metaphysical expression: nothing less rigorously realistic will serve the historical realism of the Catholic *quaerens intellectum*. Metaphysics cannot dispense with a prime analogate. St. Thomas was of course correct in insisting that the prime analogate must be God: he was wrong in supposing that God as prime analogate must be subsumed to the notion of the absolute as found in the pagan Greek tradition of Plato and Aristotle. The God who can be understood by Catholic theology to be the prime analogate of being as historical and free must be the God of the Covenant, the Lord of history, whose historicity need not be provided for, as has been done perennially by a non-historical reading of Jn 1:14,<sup>36</sup> but is given a priori, in the freedom of his Revelation in and by Jesus the Christ. Catholicism knows nothing of an "immanent Trinity;" there is no theological basis for a dehistoricization of the Trinity, nor can a dehistoricized Trinity serve as a basis for Catholic theology. The Catholic faith is historical from the outset, and seeks a historical understanding of its historical object, the Revelation of the Father in Christ, through the outpouring of the Spirit.

The God of the Catholic prime analogate is therefore the Trinity, but not as "acting ad extra" in the abstract sense upon which the Thomist notion of creation relies, but as acting historically: viz., as the Father's Mission of the Son to give the Spirit, a gift that is at once creation, revelation, and redemption: these are indissociable. The Mission of the Son does not therefore, as St. Thomas thought, terminate in the Person of Jesus the Christ: it terminates in his completion of his Mission to give the Gift of the Spirit, consummated in the outpouring of the Spirit from the Cross and the Altar that is the sacrificial institution of the New Covenant, the One Flesh of the Christ and his bridal Church, the second Eve, the Good Creation, the fulfilled Kingdom of God.

Given that the prime analogate of a Catholic metaphysics must be historical, it follows that the non-historical prime analogate of classic theological metaphysics, whether Augustinian or Thomist, cannot serve the historicity of the faith: inescapably any metaphysics developed under that aegis must become a Procrustean bed, as von Balthasar has seen: a criteriological identity-system limiting what the Church can teach to what the human mind can know a priori. A great

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<sup>36</sup> I have dealt with this problem at some length in "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14)," *STUDIA MISSIONALIA*, v. 51 (2002), 23-53.

deal of the contemporary dissent arises out of this theological ambition to mediate the truth of the faith in terms of an academic theological speculation rather than to accept its radically liturgical mediation by the Church, as integral with participation in that liturgy and thus in that mediation, and so to accept the normative and criteriological role of the dogmatic tradition in theology. It follows that, because it must be historical, the prime analogate must also be ecclesiological: it must assure the pre-eminence of faith over theology, which is concrete in the primacy of the Magisterium over the theological academy.

The only historicity that will serve the Catholic prime analogate of metaphysics is that by which it transcends history while remaining immanent in history. This requires that the prime analogate of a dogmatically-normed metaphysics must be the Eucharistic institution of the New Covenant, whose free unity in One Flesh is the ordering principle of salvation history: it is only by his Eucharistic immanence that Jesus the Christ is thus the Lord of history. Were there no Eucharistic immanence, the event of the Cross would be subordinated to the fragmentation and dissolution of fallen historicity, finally to be inaccessible and forgotten. It is only as the Eucharistic Lord that the risen Christ is “forever ancient, forever new.” It is only thus that by his Mission from the Father, by his obedience unto death on a Cross that, as Head, he can renew the creation of which he is the Head, bestowing upon it the free unity it lost in the first Adam and Eve, by the institution of the One Flesh, the only free unity there is, the unity that transcends and unifies the good creation only as Eucharistically represented.

The task of systematic theology and, if *Fides et Ratio* be taken seriously, the task of the philosophical enterprise that is driven by the same *quaerens intellectum* --- for neither the Catholic *quaerens* nor the *intellectum* that is its always transcendent goal can be multiple without falling back into the fragmentation project of a dehistoricizing rationalism --- is the developing of the free implications of the institution of this free, historical, Eucharistic prime analogate.

The first product of such a conversion will be the dismissal of the false “problem of the one and the many” which has dominated all speculative thought to date. To persist in that problematic is to institutionalize despair, to establish academically the fallen fragmentation of the human intelligence as though it were criteriological of reality as such. This “immanentization of the eschaton,” which makes the dehistoricization of being to be the way to salvation, also makes this way indistinguishable from the nullification of humanity as such. The gnostic flight from history seeks nothingness, and in this quest must destroy whatever it finds. This is the culture of death that increasingly pervades our world. It has a single alternative, the imaging of God, Eucharistically nourished and sustained. The questioning that Anselm of Bec named *fides quaerens intellectum* is integral to that imaging.

### III: Conclusion: A prospectus for a historical metaphysics

The historical prime analogate requires a historical understanding of substance: this requires a re-interpretation of act and potency as constituting a free event, not a static structure. This event

is sacramentally objective: its free unity is that of *sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, res tantum*. This order requires the conversion to history of the speculative, the metaphysical task.

This understanding of substance has its foundation in the Trinitarian Substance of God, which is free, not a monadic, immanent necessity: otherwise the Spirit could not be the subsistent mutual Love of the Father and the Son. This divine freedom is clarified by the human imaging of God which, as the Pope has taught, is nuptially ordered: the freely appropriated unity in one flesh of the husband and the wife, which is not identified with either of them, but which is their irrevocable marital covenant. Its created exemplar is of course the One Flesh of the New Covenant, instituted by the Father's sending of the Son to give the Spirit, whose Eucharistic representation can only be the Prime Analogate of substantial being.

The historical prime analogate requires a substantial understanding of history: history is not happenstance, devoid of immanent significance, for it has the free order and free intelligibility given it by the free, covenantal immanence in history of its Eucharistic Lord, the risen Jesus Christ. Fallen history has meaning only as redeemed: this is a free unity and meaning, given it by the transcendence of the Prime Event, the One Flesh that grounds and unifies an otherwise fragmented time by making it to be the history of salvation, the free unity of the Old Covenant, the New Covenant, and the Kingdom of God.

Historical substance can have only a sacramental objectivity; fallen, empirical "sarkic" historicity knows no unity whatsoever, and it is idle to seek one, as Plato knew, as Aristotle knew. Gödel has eliminated the Enlightenment program for its domestication: history understood as empirically normed, as "what actually happened," has no more intrinsic significance than a gravel pile, while the political effort to impose an extrinsic significance on history by the ideological annulling of its freedom is self-defeating.

The significance or meaning of history is inescapably sacramental. It has long been known that it cannot be reduced to an ideal clarity. The Marxist effort to reduce it to a revolutionary or political praxis has shown itself to be comparably futile, while the positivist effort to reduce it to inevitable progress is now only a bad joke. If history is to have meaning at all, that meaning must be moral, and therefore must be freely appropriated. The only free unity, the only free order that has ever been known, is that nuptial order established by the One Sacrifice of Christ, the institution of the New Covenant that is the fulfillment of the Mission of the Son to give the Spirit. To repeat, this is the only free order known to us, the free event-unity of the One Flesh. In our fallen history this plenitude can have only a sacramental objectivity. The Real Presence, the Eucharistic immanence of the Risen Lord of History, provides the only order, the only unity, that history has ever known: obviously that order must be sacramental as well. Its appropriation is free, and therefore is liturgical, Eucharistic at bottom, in that praxis that is covenantal fidelity, our nuptially-ordered imaging of God. The past, the present, the future are sacramentally ordered in the free unity of *sacramentum tantum, res et sacramentum, res tantum*, by which the past is ordered to the present and, through the present, to the anagogical future, the fulfilled Kingdom of God.



This free unity, that of the sacramental immanence in history of the Eucharistic Lord, is the sole basis for the historical curiosity that drives all free inquiry, for free inquiry, the *quaerens intellectum* that marks our humanity, is always a quest for a unity that is always partially grasped, but that is always irreducible to a rationally unified hypothesis. Our hypotheses, in any field of methodologically controlled inquiry, are never more than questions, more or less valid, more or less insightful, into a truth that is always newly before us, for yet further inquiry. While the world lasts, it will remain mysterious, a continuing invitation to the mind. The questions are indispensable: they are even integral with our worship of God, but they never comprehend, they never contain, the fullness of truth that is given us in Christ. Truth as historical and free is always transcendent to our questioning, and always invites it. Were we able to master truth, to control it and domesticate it, we would be terminally bored and boring: there would be nothing interesting to do. As it is, in the world created in Christ and imbued with his Spirit, the truth is always fascinating, for it is always before us as inexhaustible.

This invitation to discovery is recognized only by the inquirer who has chosen to be free, and whose inquiry is free because driven by a love for that Beauty whom Augustine knew to Ancient, yet forever new. Of him, the ideologue knows nothing; his quest is not for free truth but for the power to impose a false comprehension upon the world he would lock into the immanent poverty of his own mind. Willfully alienated from the Beauty that is Truth as free, as nuptially immanent in the world, that futility is inevitably an idolatry, a worship of a false divinity who, however named, is demonic, destructive of the created image of God, who can be imaged only in the freedom that is his gift to us by the Mission of the Son to give the Spirit, by which we are redeemed.

Our creation in the image of God is our creation in Christ, a creation whose unity is free by its nuptial order and which in that order freely images the Creator revealed in Christ, the Trinity that can be imaged only in freedom. For the Trinity is the source and pattern of *gratia Christi*, the created freedom that is the full Gift of the Spirit, the One Flesh of Christ and the Church, Eucharistically immanent in our history as its salvific norm. Our imaging of God, as has been indicated above, is our nuptial and covenantal fidelity which depends, not on our marital status, but on our creation in Christ.

Morality coincides with the free exercise of responsibility and authority that is covenantal fidelity, and has therefore a Eucharistic criterion, which refuses all monadism in the interpretation and expression of freedom, and consequently excludes monadism in all discussion of personal authority, responsibility, and dignity. These are nuptially ordered: every man and every woman possesses, within this subsistent and therefore personal order, and therefore with sacramental objectivity, the fullness of human dignity, authority, and responsibility, in their communal, nuptially-ordered imaging of the Community of Persons that is the Trinity, each of whom possesses the fullness of divine authority, responsibility, and dignity.