

Participation and Kenosis: A List for Schindler

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Metaphysics is dangerous, for it easily lapses into onto-theology, subordinating our God-talk into a philosophical project that eliminates mystery, or tries to, and in the process renders our God-talk religiously useless. This is not necessary if, with Aquinas, we do metaphysics as ancilla theologiae and don't confuse fides quaerens intellectum with a demand for transparency. Schindler's paper "What's the Difference?" is evaluated from this perspective. It is questioned whether and why we need the principle he seeks; it is suggested that only theology and not metaphysics can provide it; and the hope is expressed that Schindler will expand his reflection on our participation in our own being to consider our participation in God's being.

I am not a metaphysician, nor the son of a metaphysician. In fact, I'm rather suspicious of metaphysics, as you'll see. That's because I am sympathetic to Heidegger's call to an "overcoming" of metaphysics (which is not the same as its abolition), expressed in his critique of "the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics."¹ I'd like to present my understanding of that critique and my argument that Aquinas is not a metaphysician in that sense as the context for my remarks on Professor Schindler's probing and provocative paper.²

Heidegger's critique of onto-theology comes in two stages.³ In 1949, he derives the concept from Aristotle's metaphysics.⁴ Aristotle wants to study being qua being, not just some particular region of being. We have come to call such a field of inquiry ontology. But he finds that to complete his task he needs to appeal to the Unmoved Mover, so that first philosophy becomes theology, or rather, since the two elements work in tandem, onto-theology. Here one can define metaphysics in its onto-theological constitution as the affirmation and articulation of a Highest Being who is the key to the meaning of the whole of being. Heidegger reminds us that just as many actors have played Hamlet, so many beings have played the role of Highest Being. So it is not just Aristotle who is in Heidegger's cross hairs. Hegel will soon be a second major paradigm.

¹ This phrase is the title of the second essay in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

² For the Aquinas discussion, see my "Aquinas and Onto-theology," forthcoming in ACPQ. Although Heidegger presents onto-theology as of Greek rather than Christian origins and attributes it to a tradition that runs from Anaximander to Nietzsche (!), he also writes that "Christian theology, in what it knows and in the way it knows it knowledge, is metaphysics," and "the scholastic concept is merely a doctrinal formulation of the essence of metaphysics thought metaphysically." See *Hegel's Concept of Experience*, trans. Harper & Row (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 147 and *Nietzsche*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991 (four volumes in two), IV, 209.

³ For detailed analysis, see the title essay of my *Overcoming Onto-Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). Also see *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), ch. 1 & 5.

⁴ See "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," Introduction to *What is Metaphysics?* in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

But what is wrong with onto-theology so defined, and why must it be overcome? The problem according to Heidegger is *Seinsvergessenheit*. When we focus our attention on beings, even the Highest Being, we forget to think being (what it means to be), and this is the primary task of philosophy. I don't take this critique of theistic God-talk very seriously for three reasons. First, it assumes that I am doing philosophy, whereas I may be praying, or worshiping, or doing theology. Second, even if I am doing philosophy I need not share the view that the prime task is to think being. I might see the task as thinking all the different kinds of beings that there are and how they are related to each other. Finally, I might, like the "existential" Aquinas of Gilson, think it important for philosophy to think being, but find such thought to be caught up in a hermeneutical circle in which the thinking of being and the thinking of beings are mutually dependent on each other. In particular, I might try to think being by thinking the difference between created beings and the Creator.⁵ The unilateral approach of Heidegger is not self-evident, as when he writes, "Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word 'God' is to signify."⁶

In 1957, however, Heidegger deepens his analysis of metaphysics as onto-theology and his critique becomes more serious. He poses the question how God (or 'God', if you prefer) can enter philosophical discourse and he answers that "the deity can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that *and how* the deity enters into it."⁷ In other words, philosophy allows God into its discourse only on its terms and in the service of its own project. While Heidegger spells out that project in considerable detail with reference to such notions as calculative and representational thinking, the short and simple version would be that philosophy, in its onto-theological mode, seeks to render the whole of reality intelligible to *human* understanding.

Now the critique broadens beyond the notion of *Seinsvergessenheit* into the following. 1) In its quest for total transparency, metaphysics employs abstract, impersonal concepts such as *causa sui* in conjunction with the principle of sufficient reason. 2) Its goal and its achievement (so far as it succeeds) is to eliminate mystery from human experience by rendering being fully transparent to *our* understanding. 3) In the process it sets up norms for our God-talk that are religiously useless. Theology and biblical faith have as good grounds as a philosophy of human finitude to reject this project.

I think this critique has real bite; but I also think Aquinas is not guilty of onto-theology so described, and this for two reasons. To be sure, he employs abstract, impersonal metaphysical categories, if not exactly *causa sui*. But 1) his doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God and

⁵ For a fruitful analysis of Aquinas along these lines, see Jean-Luc Marion, "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theology," in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 38-74.

⁶ "Letter on Humanism," in *Pathmarks*, p. 267.

⁷ *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 55-56, emphasis added.

the corresponding doctrine of analogy, *if taken seriously*,⁸ preserve the element of mystery. To put it boldly, for Aquinas nothing we say about God is, strictly speaking, True; for Truth is defined in terms of adequation and none of our God-talk passes the adequation test. This is not to say that we are totally cut off from God, cognitively speaking, that there is no truth in the sense of what it is right for human knowers to say and to believe. But the doctrine of analogy can be put in the very terms with which Heidegger seeks to preserve a sense of mystery, namely, that unconcealment and concealment are always dialectically interwoven.

2) At least as importantly, Aquinas takes seriously the notion of philosophy as *ancilla theologiae*. This means that his abstract, impersonal categories are *aufgehoben* or teleologically suspended in concrete, personal discourse that is religiously relevant. In a surprisingly Hegelian fashion, he moves from abstract to concrete, continually recontextualizing the impersonal in the personal which it serves without governing. If one reads beyond the selections in the anthologies one will find discussions of grace and faith, incarnation and atonement, forgiveness and reconciliation, penitence and conversion, sacraments and sanctification.⁹ We don't find our true identity and destiny in this life and the life to come by thinking the Prime Mover but in receiving the gracious revelation and redemption given to us by the Holy Trinity.¹⁰

It can be debated whether Augustine and Aquinas incorporate too much Plato and Aristotle, respectively, into their writings. Perhaps from time to time they let the Athenian tail wag the Jerusalem dog on a particular theme. But in the overall structure of their thought Athens is handmaid to Jerusalem and abstract metaphysics is subordinated to a biblical personalism.

Against this background I turn to Schindler's paper and offer a list, if you will, of my responses and reactions, unequal in length and importance but in any case worthy of reflection, or so is my hope.¹¹

1) First of all, a story. A young boy who had a small dog was overheard by his father telling a playmate how a much bigger dog was angrily chasing his little pup and gaining dangerously with every giant leap. He assured his friend that the little dog had escaped by climbing up a tree and sitting safely on a limb, out of reach of the big dog below. The father rebuked the boy, saying, "You mustn't tell stories like that. You know that dogs can't climb trees." To which the boy replied, "But Daddy, he just got to!"

Too often, it seems to me, philosophy operates in the Daddy-he-just-got-to mode. First a Descartes decides that he must have absolute certainty about matters metaphysical, or a Husserl decides that philosophy must be a rigorous science; then, abra-ca-dabra alla-kazoo, the claim is

⁸ It is all too possible to take note of these themes in Aquinas and then proceed as if nothing had happened.

⁹ For a helpful overview, see Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), ch. 12 and 15.

¹⁰ Though the Holy Trinity is, as a matter of fact, not less than the Prime Mover, just a whole lot more.

¹¹ I am responding to the paper as presented to the Metaphysics Colloquium at St. Anselm College, June 15-16, 2005, and have not been able to take into account any revisions he may have made.

made that the philosopher in question has reached the desired goal and is just waiting for the rest of us puppies to climb up and sit beside him. If anyone, even God, should suggest, first, that in our finitude and fallenness we can't climb that high and, second, that in any case we don't really need to, the answer is not slow in coming, "But Daddy, we just got to!"

I found myself thinking about this story when I found Schindler posing the question: "what accounts for the *difference* between image and reality, *participans* and *participatum*?"¹² In order to avoid thinking of the finite, temporal furniture of the cave, including ourselves, as unreal or somehow a fall from unity, "we need to discover a positive *principle* for their difference." Or again, "we must nevertheless ask what it is that is responsible for the multiplicity of the sensible images." Or again, "if we deny the excess [of *participans* in relation to *participatum*] we will ultimately be without a ground for the genuine and good *difference* of the *participans*." Or again, the problem by which the notion of participation has been "haunted" is "the inability to give ultimate justification for the difference of the participant."

Daddy, we just got to have a metaphysical theory that explains and justifies the plurality of finite beings! *We do? Really? How so?* I call upon three philosophical friends to give at least a little *prima facie* weight to my skepticism. First there is Kierkegaard who is fond of distinguishing what the age needs from what it wants. It is very easy to confuse the two and we do well from time to time to ask ourselves if we really need what we think we need, and if so, why. Second there is Camus, who somewhere defines the world of myth as a world of all answers and no questions. This is not so different from metaphysics in its onto-theological constitution, as described by Heidegger. It is also not a bad definition of fundamentalism.

Finally, there is my friend and former colleague, Brian Leftow, who now teaches at Oxford. He once told me that when he presents a proof for the existence of God that he takes to be sound (and he clearly thought he could do this), he was showing that there is an explanation of the world, not giving that explanation.¹³ To argue to God as the cause of the world or some particular feature of the world is one thing. To know enough about God and divine causality to be able to explain the world in such terms is quite another. Without knowing it, Leftow was following Heidegger's advice to welcome mystery and the unexplained into our philosophical theologies. My suggestion is 1) that Schindler owes us an account of the nature of the need that drives his paper, and 2) that he will need to say more than "that's what metaphysicians do."

2) *We do? Really? How so?* We might find one answer to my irreverent questions in Schindler's take on four replies he finds to be inadequate to his claim that we need a metaphysical theory to account positively for difference. First is the reply that there is no explanation, no "good reason" for difference.¹⁴ Second is the dualistic reply that there is a

¹² In context it is clear that Schindler is using 'image' in a Platonic, ontological sense rather than in an epistemological sense signifying some mental representation.

¹³ I think it was clear that he had in mind proofs in the cosmological or teleological traditions, probably the first.

¹⁴ It is perhaps a betrayal of a certain metaphysical mind set that no distinction is made between there being no

second, positive principle, different from the One or the Good, a position Schindler simply declares to be unintelligible (how so?). Third comes the refusal to raise the question and just take difference for granted and thus to “fall into the wonderlessness of positivism ultimately to the loss of philosophy.”¹⁵ As if there were no wonder in acknowledging facts I cannot explain or justify. To put it mildly, this is a rather strong claim that philosophy comes to an end if we decide either that we don’t need such a metaphysical theory or that we can’t produce one. Finally there is the Heideggerian response of raising the question, not in order to answer it with a theory but in order to dwell in the question. Schindler describes these four possible outcomes as “either nihilism, nihilism, nihilism, or nihilism.”

I suppose each writer who speaks of nihilism needs to tell us how we should take the term. I understand it to signify that nothing is really worthwhile because all values, including especially those of truth and goodness, have been negated. This, we are told, or something like it is our fate if we cannot produce a good metaphysical theory (of participation in the present case) to ground and justify plurality.

Apart from the possibility that in order to avoid positivism and the loss of philosophy the role of metaphysics has been inflated beyond belief, philosophy just isn’t that easy. One doesn’t refute positions and postures one finds to be inadequate by sticking an ugly label on them like “nihilism.” (Politicians do this all the time, but philosophers need not lower themselves to that level.) One needs to say what nihilism is and then *show* that and how the position or posture in question either logically entails or psychologically produces nihilism. The only charitable reading of Schindler’s trotting out the four horsemen of meaninglessness is that it represents a promissory note in relation to a large and very difficult task. It is easy to see why the little dog in the boy’s story needed to climb the tree, even if dogs can’t do that. It is less easy to see that apocalyptic doom awaits us if we are unwilling or unable to produce the theory of participation Schindler hopes to provide.

3) In his discussion of participation in Plato, Schindler suggests that sensibles are “‘something’ rather than nothing but that something is their being *nothing but* forms as sensibly manifest” (his emphasis). For Spinoza the world of nature and for Hegel the worlds of nature and human history are *nothing but* the eternal logos enacted, externalized, made manifest. In neither case is there any danger that finite particulars (Spinoza’s modes) will turn out to be nothing rather than something. Nor are they without a metaphysical theory to ground and justify their plurality. It is the very nature of the “God” of each pantheistic scheme¹⁶ to become manifest as a (n ultimately) unified plurality. This is not a fall, for neither Spinoza nor Hegel has a mystical nostalgia for utter oneness. The difference from Plotinus, we might say, is more

explanation and our being unable to produce one. In the conversation described above, Leftow rightly distinguishes the question, Is there an explanation? from the question, Are we in a position to give it?

¹⁵ Socrates thought that philosophical wisdom consisted in recognizing the limits to our knowledge, in (at least sometimes) knowing that we don’t know.

¹⁶ For a detailed defense of my reading of Hegel as a pantheist, see “Hegel” in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp 293-310.

religious than metaphysical. Of course both thinkers require a return to the origin; but this takes place in theoretical knowledge of their relatedness and signifies the self-realization of the finite, which is significant in its difference from "God" and other finite beings but only in relation and not in atomic isolation.

It seems to me that if theistic metaphysics is to offer a better account of finite difference than Plato, Plotinus, and the more worldly pantheisms of Spinoza and Hegel it will have to be along the lines, as Schindler suspects, of showing that sensibles, or temporal particulars, are more than forms or the logos as sensibly present. So a good question to ask is how his theory of created beings that participate in their own non-subsistent being develops this important clue in a fruitful way. If it is not enough to say that they actualize eternal possibilities, what more needs to be said?

4) In his discussion of Plotinus and of the productive power of the One, Schindler writes that "if a failure to give generously is a result of self-seeking need, that which is absolutely transcendent and thus 'independent,' that which therefore has no trace of need, cannot fail to be absolutely generous." Formally this looks OK.

FGG, SSN
not SSN
therefore not FGG

This leads to talk about the generosity of the One. But there appears to be an equivocation here. In the protasis, to speak of a failure to give generously is to speak of a personal being of whom generosity and self-seeking might be predicated. But in the apodosis that condition may well have disappeared. The sun, ever a paradigm of emanation, does not radiate heat and light on the basis of self-seeking need. But that does not make it generous except in a purely metaphorical sense. Similarly, it seems to me, Plotinus' One can only be described as generous only metaphorically, not even analogically. So it is not clear that we can speak of the One's production as being "as much an act of free will as an act of (inner) necessity," bringing Plotinus "closer to the Christian notion of *creatio ex nihilo* than is generally acknowledged." Unless, that is, the passage in VI.8 to which Schindler refers calls for a radical revision of our understanding of Plotinus, a question I'm happy to leave to those who are better equipped than I to resolve it.

5) Schindler finds the solution to his problem in Aquinas, more particularly in the three-fold notion that for finite beings participation signifies the relation of every *ens* to its own *esse*, that this *esse* is non-subsistent, has no reality outside the relation, and that the relation, the act or event of participation, is caused by God. Perhaps it is unfair, since one should comment on the paper written rather than on the paper one wishes had been written, but I was keenly disappointed that the discussion of participation in Aquinas did not address the question of the

participation of finite beings in the being of God.¹⁷ It seems to me that the ontological theme of participation and the onto-epistemic doctrine of analogy cry out, if we are to do metaphysics, for an analysis of the relation between created being and Uncreated Being that goes beyond affirming creation, namely that the former is caused by the latter. I shall return to this point.

Is my sense that we need such an analysis another instance of but-Daddy-we-just-got-to philosophy? Perhaps. But what initially shaped my hope and led to my disappointment was the notion of philosophy as *ancilla theologiae*. To the best of my knowledge, the term *methexis* does not occur in the New Testament. But the notion of participation, often expressed in terms of various forms of the “Platonic” term *koinonia*, often occurs. The Corinthians are told that they share in Paul’s sufferings (2 Cor. 1:7); the Colossians that they are enabled or called to share in the inheritance of God’s holy people (Col. 1:12); and the Hebrews are told that they share flesh and blood with Christ (Heb. 3:14). Of greater interest and conceptual complexity is the notion that believers share in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13). Does this mean simply that there is some similarity between the two sufferings, or does it mean something stronger? The latter seems suggested by Col. 1:24. Speaking there of his own sufferings, Paul says “I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (NRSV); “for the sake of Christ’s body, the church, I am completing what still remains for Christ to suffer in my own person” (REB); “to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church” (NJB). Here what Jesus says about bearing the cross as the meaning of discipleship is given a dramatic, personal interpretation that echoes through the other passages about sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Can the metaphysics of participation serve as a kind of spiritual director to those who would take these words seriously?

Finally, the primary basis for my hope that the participation of our being in God’s being would be discussed comes in 2 Peter 1:4, which refers to the promises through which we “may become participants of the divine nature” (NRSV), “may come to share in the very being of God” (REB), “should share the divine nature” (NJB). Participants or sharers here are *koinonoi* and the divine nature or being is the divine *physis*.¹⁸

This latter text has played a key role in the Eastern Church’s theology of divinization, a somewhat lesser role in the Western Church. But no church can afford to ignore it, and one would hope that a Christian metaphysics of participation might shed some light on what is involved. Especially in view of the fact that this participation is not a permanent, given fact about the believer but a goal, a telos, there is at least an implicit link here between metaphysics

¹⁷ Setting Aquinas against the background of Plato and Plotinus points in this direction, since both their views and what is found to be problematic from a Christian perspective involve the participation of the temporal in the Eternal, the many in the One, the worldly in the Transcendent.

¹⁸ Cf. 1 John 1:3. NRSV gives a weak translation of *koinonia*: “and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” But REB and NJB give stronger readings: “that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ” and “Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

and spirituality. Understanding the nature of this goal might contribute to understanding and inspiring the practices that contribute to receiving such a grace.

When the term “scholasticism” is used as a pejorative, it usually signifies a separation of philosophy from religious existence, of metaphysics from spirituality. Whenever this separation occurs it is tragic, for Christians are never merely spectators of essences. But the “scholastic” traditions, including the work of Aquinas, have had and can continue to have a different, healthier import. I can define this import negatively in terms of what a former colleague once told me. “Some people do crossword puzzles,” he said. “I do philosophy. I find its puzzles interesting to work on.” Speculative metaphysics (and other modes of philosophy – my colleague was not a metaphysician) always runs the risk of getting so enamored with its puzzles that it forgets the larger point of it all and lets it sound as if we do metaphysics to amuse ourselves or as a form of non-violent combat (like chess). I’m not suggesting that every essay in metaphysics needs to have an existential preface or coda, but that the “So what?” question never be lost sight of for too long.

In the present case my plea is that those who worry about the metaphysics of participation place their work at the service of the spirituality of 2 Peter 1:4. I hope that Schindler will at some point put his very considerable knowledge and skill to work in this way.

There is a danger here. The temptation is to confuse the attempt at metaphysical clarification and spiritual guidance with the gospel message itself, making a metaphysical theory that addresses the biblical text but is not derived from it part of a community’s exclusionary identity. I am frequently in situations where a Roman Catholic Mass is being celebrated, and there is a deep, personal pain to know that I am excluded from the Eucharist because I do not hold to a particular metaphysical account of the words of Jesus in instituting this sacrament. For the Christian, I believe, metaphysics can never be more than ancillary.

6) Although I have expressed my doubts about whether we really need the kind of theory Schindler seeks, especially when every alternative is branded as nihilism, and although I have expressed my disappointment that he focuses on our participation in our own being rather than in God’s being, I do not think the question he poses is “scholastic” in the pejorative sense or *necessarily* onto-theological. When we have finished tracing all the trajectories and reconstructing all the redactions of the creation stories in Genesis, the bottom line is quite simple. God created a rich plurality of finite beings and found the result to be “very good.” The diversity of the created order is not nothing; nor is it a fall from somewhere or other that needs to be undone. The affirmation of the integrity of created things is an essential part of what we mean by creation, and this we say by faith. If metaphysics can help us better to understand this affirmation,¹⁹ this is a gift and a task worth undertaking.

¹⁹ My view is that philosophy is always *fides quaerens intellectum*, even if the *fides* is often not a religious credo. We all come to philosophy with beliefs that have not already been subjected to reflective scrutiny.

Once again, however, I'm a bit skeptical, and to indicate why I cite a rather long passage from Kierkegaard's papers.

The greatest good, after all, which can be done for a being, greater than anything else that one can do for it, is to make it free. In order to do just that, omnipotence is required. This seems strange . . . [but] if one will reflect on omnipotence, he will see that it also must contain the unique qualification of being able to withdraw itself again in a manifestation of omnipotence in such a way that precisely for this reason that which has originated through omnipotence can be independent.... Moreover, there is a finite self-love in all finite power (talent, etc.). Only omnipotence can withdraw itself at the same time it gives itself away, and this relationship is the very independence of the receiver. God's omnipotence is therefore his goodness. For goodness is to give oneself away completely, but in such a way that by omnipotently taking oneself back one makes the recipient independent. All finite power makes [a being] dependent; only omnipotence can make [a being] independent, can form from nothing something which has its continuity in itself through the continual withdrawing of omnipotence.²⁰

Surprisingly, Kierkegaard presents himself here as metaphysician, focusing attention on the abstract, impersonal concept of omnipotence. This is not without its value both for what it shows about the creation of free beings and for goading us to rethink what omnipotence signifies. But it is clearly insufficient. Omnipotence may be a necessary condition for creating freedom, but it is not a sufficient condition. Plotinus' One and Spinoza's "God" may be said to be omnipotent, but neither can withdraw in the sense here presented as a necessary condition of finite freedom.²¹ Kierkegaard knows this and performs an *Aufhebung* or teleological suspension of omnipotence in goodness as the absence of the self-love that creates dependence. But this still won't quite do. As we have seen, Plotinus' One and Spinoza's "God" are devoid of need, desire, and self-love. But they are also devoid of the goodness Kierkegaard needs and can be said to be generous only metaphorically.

What is needed is a truly personal goodness,²² a free decision to share the "space" of being with others. This generosity, which we might call kenotic,²³ takes us beyond the categories and principles of metaphysics, beyond even that Necessary Being whose essence is to exist to a God whose act of being is but an abstract dimension of the creative act of love of which the former is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Here we get an answer to the question of

²⁰ *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 62 (entry 1251). The notion of God's withdrawal to make room for finite freedom recalls the notion of *Tsimtsum* in Lurianic Kabbala with which Kierkegaard may have been familiar through the mediation of Schelling. See Gershom Scholem, *Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961).

²¹ This is what gives rise to one set of problems Schindler seeks to avoid.

²² "Truly" here signifies, in Thomistic terms, a meaning that is literal but analogical.

²³ If we think in these terms, the incarnational kenosis becomes a continuation of the creational kenosis and the Hebrew link between creation and redemption is extended to Christian faith and thought.

what it means for finite beings to be more than “forms as sensibly manifest,” more than the eternal logos enacted, externalized, made manifest. Their being has its own integrity because it is a product of personal love. They count; they matter not merely because God loves them but because their very being has been given them in an act of love that is at once *kenosis* and *koinonia*.

We are in properly theological territory, for it is faith rather than reason, Scripture rather than philosophical speculation that gives us this thought to think, not only in our lives of worship and service but also in our metaphysical meditations. In the final analysis, the “principle” (if that is the language we are to speak) that points us to the integrity of finite beings in their plurality and difference belongs to biblical religion rather than (or, perhaps, before) metaphysical theory: God is love. Even the child can understand this; and not even the metaphysician can comprehend it.