

Stephen Theron

Unboundedly Rational Religion

Thinking the Inheritance

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by

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Preface

Monotheism might be regarded as the absolutisation of the absolute point of view with which both modern philosophy and modern science have striven to identify themselves, to the point of eschewing merely natural certainties. Thus it has in a sense preceded these two phenomena as condition for their birth, a condition they not unnaturally seek ceaselessly to improve upon, in an at least partial rejection. This is captured by the notion of differentiation and reintegration as one operation, arguably the essence of the ancient three-termed syllogism.

This book therefore attempts the ultimate reintegration of recasting the spontaneous religious movement of monotheism, of Judaism developing into Christianity, arguably a form of atheism, in scientific or absolute mode. Islam, where touched upon, is treated under its aspect, incidental it may be but undeniable historically, of one of the many variants upon Christianity. It does not ignore the previous attempt by Hegel to do precisely the same but rather builds consciously upon it. An experience of neo-Thomism virtually unknown to Hegel is also brought to bear, leading to the conclusion that it is Hegel rather than the neo-scholastics or Jesuits or even Kant who develops the Thomist Augustinian Aristotelian developments. If it was Kant who differentiated here then Hegel reintegrated, while we here have performed a further reintegration, centring ultimately upon Parmenides. The final position though, as stressing human command over the material presented to thought, freedom over being, is distinctively post-modern.

An introductory chapter loads the scales in favour of an idealist approach in quasi-Quinean sense, in that being is called in question, as it is throughout the book. After a chapter revising the best expositions of faith as a possibly rational attitude the Christian discovery or intuition of intra-divine events or processes, held compatible with divine infinity and immutability, is treated under the rubric of a Trinitarian philosophy. This leads to analysis of notions of being (identity in difference) and, above all, of creation, viewing this as freed from the historic dualism which has contradicted the necessary infinity of the first principle. Creation is not thereby denied but seen as truly a constituent of the divine life. The picture is thus monistic, which is to say scientific as presenting a holistic system or way of seeing things absolutely or beyond appearance merely.

The consequences for human metaphysical and moral nature are rigorously drawn, freed from all anthropomorphisms so as better to illuminate the insights of religion and philosophy. The relevance for contemporary movements from palaeontology to Church ecumenism is brought out, while a concluding epilogue attempts to shed light on the vexed debate on Europe in relation to the Christian inheritance. Other concluding chapters treat of both sacramental religion and of dialectic as the method of reason, whether in theology or in the world. For the world without the reason is not an object of thought, any more than you can wash the fur without wetting it, in G. Frege's words.

INTRODUCTION: How Real Are We?

How real are we? In particular, what reality has any temporal ephemeral substance in comparison with the timeless truth (or falsity) of ideas. In this book it is appropriate, if unusual, to consider those religious traditions, so decisively influential upon the history of philosophy, claiming to come from out of the world, with a special *authority*, consequently, as retailed by an empowered prophet or "more than a prophet". Despite theology's occasional claim to be "queen of the sciences" she has in the last analysis to submit her being and teaching to philosophical evaluation, since even a stance of theological positivism would require argument to justify it, as we find in Karl Barth, for example.

Nor should such evaluation limit itself to a question of truth or falsity. Philosophy is needed to draw out the meaning of the supposed revelation. This indeed is three quarters of the work of theology itself as well. In brief, this book needs no apology, insofar at least as any question of "eternal life", our subject here, can be considered as remaining open. After all, for that thesis too, of the openness of this question, there are arguments, some better than others.

*

A century ago in England R.H. Benson wrote a historical novel, *By What Authority?*, in favour of a triumphantly logical, and loved, Roman Catholicism beleaguered by Tudor absolutism and English national feeling, as well as by the theories, which some would call insights, of Luther and other then recent "reformers". The title question comes from a scene in the Gospels. For Benson, it seems, all authority comes from Christ-God through Peter to the Roman hierarchy under the Pope. This, he would insinuate, is just what Christ would not tell the Pharisees, viz. by what authority he did what he did. In his "counter-example" of John the Baptist, however, Jesus asks "Was it from heaven or from men?" He does not repeat the term "authority" (*exousia*). Perhaps, therefore, he was not comfortable with it and in his own life he may have been even less comfortable with it than the evangelist, in the midst of the first Jewish-Christian conflict, discreetly indicates.

So it is a weak point for Benson and those of his mind that his title-question mirrors pharisaic categories, too crude and forensic for the "prophet and more than a prophet" of the Sermon on the Mount, for example. The Pharisees, after all, were referring to his not being one of them or of some parallel ecclesial body commissioning him, to his not having been through the usual school of priestly or scribal formation ending with an authoritative commission, as still practised in the churches.

We have however little reason to doubt that Jesus himself commissioned leaders, "shepherds", to whom he wanted people to listen. He stressed though that they were not to "lord it" over those whom they were there rather to serve, whether expounding those scriptures Jesus claimed to fulfil or organising money collections, tasks that others also were equally free to fulfil. The idea of two levels of service, of those who sit or do not sit "in the seat of Moses", was Jewish, and there is little reason to assume that Jesus the Jew would have abolished it. Thus the disciples continued after his death to go to the synagogue for the prescribed prayers. It was before such synagogal bodies that Paul or Stephen first wished to proclaim Jesus as Christ. However the imitation of this pattern among the first Christians and in some theologies, even to the point of reviving the idea of a sacrificing priesthood, may well have been a development more human than divine. The new movement maybe needed around two millennia to realise its supra-religious character, quite apart from the need (after its adoption

by the Emperor in particular) to impose itself upon a populace impressed by such things and accustomed, like most of humanity, to priests and their sacrifices.¹

It is remarkable, I note here, that Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth Christian century, takes as his example of a natural law more evident *apud omnes* than those secondary precepts devised by human reason (such as private property) the need to offer sacrifice to divine beings. What is even more remarkable is to find contemporary Thomists still confidently repeating this example as if it were self-evident in our secularised or Protestant world, where it appears distinctly archaic and so little self-evident as to seem a prime counter-example to the thesis of natural law invariance.

Perhaps Aquinas wanted to highlight that the Mass as a sacrifice, something is hardly self-evident. The Christian impulse, one can hardly deny, was to abolish propitiatory sacrifice in favour of what pleases God in human behaviour, the conduct of life. That the life and death of Christ himself has often been presented as a sacrifice, *the* supreme sacrifice, on the old sacerdotal model, is surely to be ascribed to a theological mood only, a need for figure and analogy, for mystical types. Thus even a conservative Christian of today such as C. S. Lewis balks at the idea that God wants blood, preferring to present salvation not as "atonement" but as God's first doing for us what we otherwise would not manage ourselves, viz. dying (and rising again). And so we find Aquinas, again, in the heyday of the sacrifice-theology, saying that one drop of Christ's blood was enough and more to "atone" for sins, thus undermining the whole sacrificial paradigm without saying so.

But if a sacrificial priesthood is not needed, then one can wonder whether that other prong of religious control, viz. jurisdiction, hierarchy, is more than a human preference either. It was, again, the Pharisees who introduced a question about authority. What Jesus says is "Believe me for the very works' sake", i.e. for myself, and not as an empowered official, even if it is true that some accounts of the resurrection stress a now unique empowerment, inseparable from the idea of ascensional enthronement but clearly intended, all the same, to bolster the power of the leaders of the first Christian communities. "Whoever listens to you listens to me."

Thus we come to "the" resurrection. As distinct from the idea of enthronement resurrection was already enshrined in at least a part of the most progressive and visionary Judaism, that of *II Maccabees*, reflected in the presumably typical figure of Martha in John's Gospel, as a *general* destiny either for all or for "the just", as in the teachings of Qumran, for those who had suffered for Yahweh, for his name. So it might seem retrograde to make the possibility of rising again depend upon Jesus, as if God could not raise just anyone, a viewpoint safeguarded in the traditional teaching of *John 5* of the resurrection of "the wicked" as well, to judgement. But resurrection is here separated from glorification, coming only through the uniquely just man and Son (a relation not clearly dependent in Scripture upon a virgin birth, however the unique election, of him who "came out from God", was to be thought of).

In some traditions, some early communities therefore, e.g. the Marcan, there appears to have been an aversion to the idea of resurrection *appearances*, made so central in later, more unified teaching. There need be no "lost ending" to Mark's Gospel therefore.² Perhaps the miracle for him is the empty tomb, though in that case why would the angel ask the women why they sought the living among the dead, i.e. if the author's mind were that there were no dead there? The "He is not here" is not entirely decisive on this point of interpretation, even if the traditional way of taking it may still seem *prima facie* the more natural. One might want to say that the Christian hope leads one already to live in the glory beyond the Last Day, as

¹ My view of Jesus and Christianity owes a great deal to the arguments and research of H. Küng and E. Schillebeeckx. Cf. Damien Casey's article (on the Internet) on the *fractio panis* in early Christian frescoes and the references given there (search under Damien-Casey). See also Juan Arias, *Jesus*.

² Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*.

when Jesus offers Martha something better than her "I know that he will rise again at the last day", although all the generations of Christians have been in no better case than she with regard to the deaths of loved ones, the great triumphs of faith and hope seeming to leave grief in place, even if we are not "as those who have no hope". But again, the Jewish mother in *II Maccabees* had great hope.

*

Even the resurrection might not fully satisfy human aspirations unless it were specified as a full reclamation of the past, an abiding embodiment of memory, such as might be one of the more positive motives for the "eternal return" idea, claimed by today's defenders of Nietzsche to be a scientific hypothesis.³ Finding, anyhow, a reality to suffice for actual human aspirations, or being able at least to postulate it, may be seen as part of the investigation into our own reality as preventing it from being, let us say, substantively Sisyphean or self-defeating, ontologically interpreted.

The notion of such reclamation (of the past) can however be viewed as an expansion of the divine ideas thesis. God, concludes Aquinas, as we have noted, does not know created things in themselves but in his idea(s) of them, which are, each one, identical with himself. Similarly human memory, man being in the divine image, is of a greater dignity than a mere power to recall a dead past. It is incidental to memory to be restricted to the past. If the future were more than an *ens rationis* it could hold that too.⁴ The point here is that it holds things and events more nobly and fully than does our fleeting experience of their actual occurrence. As God is not removed from us by knowing us rather in his idea of us, where he is total active determinant, so in our memory we give things, or are called upon to give them, their true form and promise, forever. Nothing is lost, which means it is embodied in resurrection, even resurrected. Thus even a hypnotist resurrects, if only, as it might seem, from our brains, memory of which we are no longer conscious.

Our dignity then, in concert with the mercy and faithfulness belonging to any possible infinite being, requires resurrection beyond the powers of nature as we know it, but natural at this ethico-religious level. Some notions of "supernatural grace" have obscured this. Of course all is gift. That goes without saying, and some gifts are doubtless "higher" than others. But we should hope that "death shall not have dominion"; as did the pious Jews of their time or Dylan Thomas in ours.

We might see then the resurrection of Jesus, the Gospel accounts, as fostering a general hope, indeed belief, that "death shall have no dominion", rather than as being a very particular, quasi-sacramental cause of what is to happen at the "Last Day". We have noted already that appearances, possibly even an empty tomb, are not essential to all visions of Christ's resurrection-cum-enthronement as held by the various groups among the first Christians. Similarly, the sitting "with Christ in the heavenly places" of *Ephesians* can bring the Last Day together with, telescope it, not only with an individual's death-day, when he passes "out of time", but also, in an anticipation sure enough to make it actual, with this very present. This surely was the seed-ground of Western optimism, and of a dream of human dignity. *Agnosce o Christiane dignitatem tuam*, exclaims the late fourth, early fifth century Augustine, transported in contemplation of the Christian proclamation and what it entails.

Our point though is that this can apply on a view of the resurrection rather different from Augustine's, putting the stress rather where we find it in Kant's philosophy, which then the

³ See "Nietzsche's Metaphysics" in *A Dictionary of Metaphysics and Ontology* (ed. Burkhardt & Smith), Philosophia Verlag, Munich 1990.

⁴ Here one can see the positive point in Richard Sylvan's "sistology", his Meinongian complaint of prejudice in favour of the actually existent.

rising of Christ but confirms, though as maybe the supreme instance of it. The view is not foreign to the New Testament indeed, where they declare it is not possible that death could hold such a man, since God is faithful, just as is said of the martyrs to this God in the Old Testament, especially in later pre-Christian times, increasing clarity fighting against the apparent dominion of death.

We might ask further though about that embodiment of memory we mentioned. For Aquinas every resurrected individual finds himself "at the perfect age", of thirty-three perhaps. Against this we have traditions of cherubs, cupids, *putti* and so on, and our poetic traditions of our childhood, "angel infancy", as itself a perfect age in a very special sense. The typically modern re-evaluation of family situations with the stress on respect for children, their rights, to the point of a quarrel with traditional notions of discipline and upbringing, the desire rather to enjoy children while and as they are just as children, seems indeed a natural outcome of the Romantic idealisation of childhood found in Wordsworth or Newman and based upon the Gospel itself. If it is complained that children are treated as adults a rejoinder may be that young parents now behave, and wish to behave, more like children, with more of the freedom and immediacy of children. A child who dies, any, might need no more to resurrect as an adult than a thirty-year-old might then need to be a sixty-year-old.

Aquinas also speaks of angels, all of whom, he argues, have the species or natures of all things (individual as well?) imprinted on their intellects from their creation, independently of experience, and it is from this perspective that he can exploit the saying that men shall be "as the angels" who, it follows from the above, have no need to "grow up". The thought is that there is no marriage or family in heaven, no *further* marriage one might think, though C. S. Lewis too is keen to dissociate the resurrection from renewed contact with spouses, relatives and so on ("I'm afraid we have no assurance" etc. etc.). But here we are arguing precisely against this sheer dependence upon authority and real or imagined historic promise, not as if despising it but as seeking the metaphysical roots in which such premises themselves would have to be grounded, as true to eternal being. The positivist theological talk, incidentally, as it developed in the fourteenth century, about an absolute freedom of God, unrelated to truth (which they mistakenly see as a conditioning factor) and hence random, is quite simply the denial of God as anything more than an ideological cipher, in a philosophy unconscious of itself.

If, anyhow, such species, such knowledge, are then, though *post factum*, impressed upon men as well, all men and women of whatever background, then there will in each case be a different kind of integration, if indeed nothing is forgotten. The promise is of seeing all things as God sees them, as he sees himself even. Eventually one would want that, maybe. Earlier though we imagined some kind of eternalisation of our earthly experience, symbolised in the "eternal return", though a transfiguration might be wanted to be involved. This is not far from Biblical views, if one thinks of the transfigured wounds of Christ, "slain from the foundations of the world". That was his experience, after all. But then we might all be as we die, another piece of tradition, this last moment somehow including all our memory and giving it its eternal character, whatever that will be (the "many mansions").

Aquinas's unbaptized babies become grave young men, or women, in a Dantean limbo. We mentioned cherubs and *putti*. Is there for humans a perfect age, except in some off-centre animal sense? Would children, in an eternal world, suffer from not growing if "of such is the kingdom of heaven"? Then what was the point of saying that, to offer a kind of *argumentum ad hominem*? One might imagine a life of four years, of a latter-day English child perhaps. His or her early death might be as it were a call to just that child's state we others were only permitted to pass through. In eternity, resurrected, he may be as on his death's day. The garden he looked upon, his mother's face, a certain picture-book, a pet dog or cat, all these open ever outwards as so many icons, bearers of the absolute. Memories of evil show up for

the empty poverty they are, swallowed up in the humour of an unimaginable forgiveness, a desire to console. He has no desire to be older, no dream of "when I am big". Children do not commonly so dream with any desire, while the aged who mourn for lost youth maybe lack wisdom. Youth is for them, according to our thesis, in memory, embodied memory.

Yet such is the nature of our subject that we might as well, following a Gospel lead, invert the whole conception and hypothesise that everyone finds himself there as a child, instead of Aquinas's "perfect age" of thirty-three. Concerning babies anyhow, however far towards conception we go back in supposing eternal life, we are free to speculate, to imagine states friendly to our thesis. These truly are the naked *putti*, flying through the air, peeping through the petals of flowers, laughing and gurgling upon the winds of heaven. Who knows, except that no one wants to be other than he or she is? An infant death, again, is maybe a call to an eternity as a joyous sylph-like spirit, a zephyr taking many forms, as in our childhood books and poetry, and by quality of being not much concerned with adult knowledge, as the Ring of Power was a pure trinket to J.R.R. Tolkien's embodied nature spirit in his Old Forest, Tom Bombadil. There would be no reason not to want to be Tom Bombadil.

*

Some will want to find this a facile optimism, dispensing with the "strait gate", the "narrow road", though I think we can use these ideas too. It certainly might seem to devalue or at least relativise adult human intellect somewhat. In the ambience, anyhow, of "high" Anglicanism in which I first encountered Catholic notions nothing seemed to people more urgent than to pour scorn upon the conciliatory saying, "Well, we are all going the same way, aren't we?" "No we are *not* all going the same way", would snap back the irritated answer. Those were pre-ecumenical days and there was, one suspected, often enough a tired indifference to religious truth in the closing of discussions with that saying, though it was not found so outrageous as the variant "It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive". But is this universal fraternalism of the shared road necessarily a product of fatigue or hopelessness? What if it is a triumph of hope such as the narrowly religious, clutching their solitary talent, have lacked the magnanimity to embrace?

Our claim is that the Christian resurrection-faith has somehow served to unlock a more general or philosophico-cosmic insight within the historical *populus Christianus*, and maybe further afield too. This emphasis was present in the early Alexandrine school and Gnosticism had elements of it, though always commingled with a repellent dualism. But too much of what these people were after was rejected, perhaps out of mass-fear of the higher literate class just as much as from a felt need for purity of doctrine. It is significant that Luther's teaching, at one of the first crossroads of modernity, is sometimes classed as Gnostic (e.g. by Eric Voegelin), insofar as it makes salvation depend upon a purely mental certainty or "assurance". Even if we cannot, even should not, ourselves claim such an assurance (of "salvation") yet the Reformation remains a breakthrough of subjectivity and of the subjective confidence a person ought to have, though independently even of any putatively positive revelation maybe enormously strengthening it (but always bringing with it the temptation to fanaticism or intemperate zeal).

The Catholic condemnation of this assurance depends upon a very fine point. It does not, for example, condemn the well-known stance of Julian of Norwich, "All shall be well and all manner of thing..." All manner of thing might seem to mean well for you and me whoever we are. Dylan Thomas, we saw, continues the tradition that "Death shall have no dominion", the mad shall grow sane, the sea give up its dead and so on. One may not however assume without argument and for the sake of this paradigm that all evil acts, inclusive of a choice of death (for others especially), reduce to madness. It was, anyhow, always good to give vent

with the psalmist to strong hope, *non moriar sed vivam*, or the heartfelt prayer *non confundar in aeternam*, so easily shading from the subjunctive imperative into a felt future simple, an irrepressible assurance become palpable in, for example, Bruckner's Catholic setting of Ambrose's *Te Deum*. Here we have assurance consequent upon a strong exercise of hope, the virtue, and no mere presumption.

There is as it were a quarrel, basic to our being, between intellect and time. It is as if we begin to participate in a knowledge of time which is itself eternal. Memory just in itself begins this assimilation even in the short term, creating the possibility over one, ten or more minutes in which "time stands still". It is unthinkable that any of experience be lost or vanish, though it may take on a different aspect. God knows all things, we say, and certainly truth remains. So St. Teresa was right that this our being ought to arouse in us great desires as proportionate.

*

J.R.R. Tolkien, no mean theologian, spoke of God's (or "Iluvatar's") special *gift* to men of death, not given to his elves, for example. Resurrection philosophies are ways of trying to explicate how death can be a gift, and we have distinguished resurrection from appearance events (e.g. those in the Gospels) as being a wider notion. Protest remains, however, the protest against death, the foreseeing of nostalgia and we have tried to meet that with our theory of memory as fullest embodiment, as the presence of all times. Yet the memory has to be more than memory as we know it. We might require that the events must be as actual as when actually occurring, as now. So a realisation of God, of the divine ideas as our proto-reality, may negate this hesitation. We look forward to a glorification from which this existence now will seem insubstantial.

Belief in divine ideas creates the possibility of meeting one's own image, the *Doppelgänger* who is more truly myself (as God is closer to me than I am to myself) than I am and therefore shakes my identity to its foundation as he, who is I, passes by. But I must pass over into his life, he who knows my childhood glories and sufferings more intimately than I do myself, like the heavenly man of Daniel in some ways.

This feeling of possible nostalgia, betrayal of present or any reality, was strong in Nietzsche, for whom it must always be *this* life, *this* world, eternally projected even in its temporality, just as the life of Christ, a certain number of years, reflects, embodies, the Trinitarian processions, so that it is not a *change* in a "pre-existent" Christ. Rather, that life has always existed, as caused by being known, it too, in the divine eternal idea of it. But a question then is whether resurrection is not present there in the midst of that life as a growing light (or does each day grow in memory?), not negated by any experience of death. We only experience the deaths of others, as we think. Even a release from great pain would always be just that, never death, where if we know no more we also do not know *it*. It is an objectification. But is this not to deny our hope? It would mean anyway that we have to learn to love our life now, and that "to them that have shall be given".

*

One becomes more and more dissatisfied with traditional speculations, about body and soul, sense memory versus (surviving) intellectual memory and so on. What is wrong with all these speculations is the idea of a *time after* the "death of the body".

But first of all we can wonder, again, if anyone dies at all (setting aside the idea of *the body* dying). We observe indeed the deaths of others, but no one observes or experiences his own death, since it is defined as the *end* of experience. This must be so, even if the heart or brain were recorded on our instruments as "dead", i.e. no longer functioning, yet if experience

palpably continued we would have to change our notions (maybe we would then think that life was supported by something in the liver or elsewhere).

Consider next the idea of the "eternal return", taken up again by Nietzsche. The so to say poetic merit of that conception, though it is also a serious hypothesis in physics, is that nothing is lost. This corresponds to the love we have for our life, its memories. "Gather up the fragments so that nothing be lost", we might want to say. If one embraces that conception one can perhaps live through time in the awareness that all is present all the time and beyond. One need not actually experience *sensations* of recurrence. We live as it were hanging between Proust and Plato.

This was also a way of destroying the confused and gloomy idea of the "time after". In Sweden, for example, one speaks naturally of the dead as having *gone out of time* (*de gick ur tiden*) at the moment of death, as we say that they passed away or, less felicitously, passed on. Passing away, however, is in English culture seen as a vulgar euphemism veiling a horrific reality, as is not the case in Sweden. One preserves an affectionate contact with previous generations, whom one will eventually join.

Nietzsche wanted to say, maybe, that this life is all there is, that it is fully sufficient, since it has infinite depths corresponding to the capacity of our intellect as *capax Dei*. Thus the Evangelist said that the whole world could not contain all the books that would need to be written to describe what a certain relatively short-lived person (Jesus) did. We do not want to look forward to a "future state" in which we will be strange to ourselves, having merely changed horses as Feuerbach put it. Nor need the idea of glory be interpreted in this way. As for *agilitas* and the various qualities of the resurrection body, we should as far as possible aim at acquiring those characteristics now. Of course the ageing, the crippled, still more those born crippled, and therefore indeed all of us, must and should hope for such a transfiguration, and this shows the limitation of the Nietzschean conception. Still, it is a general rule that to them that have shall be given, and we should all think of ourselves as having the gift of abundant life becoming ever more abundant, everlasting joy upon our faces, our mortal faces, and so on.

But if that solution, convertible into the possession of all of our actual or "empirical" life in memory, maybe a memory, *present* memory, more actual than our fancied present, is insufficient, and the "future state" notion, on the other hand, is somehow blasphemous, life-denying, then fulfilment seems to escape us.

The solution, like all solutions, depends upon our confidence in the infinite being from whom everything comes. I mean a confidence not only in his or her faithfulness, but in his or her being as infinite, outside of which there is no being to speak of (though we of course speak of it since our language is devised for and fitted to the being of our non-being)).

Thus Aquinas concludes rightly that this being's knowledge of us is knowledge of his own thought or idea of us rather than of us in ourselves, in the way that we think of ourselves as in ourselves. He does not depart from the eternal contemplation of his own essence in thinking of us or (causatively) knowing us. Indeed each (to us) separate idea is identical with his simple essence and act of being. This of course means that they are not really distinct and this alone makes Traherne, Wordsworth, Vaughan or Charles Williams (or Leibniz or Nicholas of Cusa) right in seeing a glory in each particular, "a world in a grain of sand", something which corresponds to each individual person's natural urge to know all things and their first cause.

God is the true idealist and solipsist. In this sense all is "stored for thee at home" and nothing is lost. I am not firstly myself. The infinite being is closer to me than this self, as Augustine already knew. The world is God's dream, even after granting that a divine dream is substantial and truly creative, just as he speaks with things and not mere symbols. His Word is indeed a person, for Trinitarians. So we are dream figures, but born to find our reality in his eternity. How?

We shall understand, firstly, that we sit there already, "in the heavenly places", a truth that predestination would hint at. In this sense we have all died before, we all look back upon an infinitely repeated life, to use mythological terms. We are, in knowing our life, participating in the eternal unchanging knowledge. Only joy is the rule, and peace and so on, and all evil and failure shall be overcome. So we are never entirely in it. What else is hope? Hope is indeed the ethical quality of this knowledge (or faith and love: it is the same). "And the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." For that destruction we are of course always waiting; and yet it has occurred already, before the foundation of the world even, deep in eternity, which is one with necessary being.

Sunlight on the grass, on water, a child's face, a moment of music, an insight quicker than thought, anything at all... To look is to paint a picture, an icon, of what "eye hath not seen". It comes down to that inspiredly simple thought, that "God is not a God of the dead, but of the living", so if God is a God of any of our dead then those dead, out of time maybe, are living. God, after all, cannot be seen as ignorant, so if we are alive for him then we are truly alive and how he knows us, in his "essence", is how we truly are. It is a matter therefore not merely, with Shostakovich, say, of protesting against death (his penultimate symphony) but of denying it. "He who believes in me will never die." Nor does it seem that there is need to interpret that belief as restrictively as has been done in the past.

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Cripples, we say, certainly don't want those evils and privations eternalized and it is said by our metaphysicians that there is no divine idea of evil, though God has perfect knowledge of every reality. So one postulates ideas of eternal compensation, analogous to the dead infants resurrected to a humanity at the "perfect age" of thirty-three.

This is however in principle transcended in the Christian tradition in the idea of the Lamb slain from the foundations of the world, or that of the glorified *wounds* of Christ. This image permits the realities of just this man's earthly life to be eternally possessed, in "glory". So why not apply the same measure to the privations, pains, shortcomings, of us others. This intuition, anyhow, lies behind the idea of *indifference*, that joys and woes can equally be taken from God's hand, as what is best for as belonging individually to us. Hence the folly of envy. Popular wisdom concurs in allotting a variety of different characters, the star-signs, which an individual should gladly accept as his destiny, as he should the day of the week on which he is born, even though "Wednesday's child is full of woe". This has nothing to do with the Calvinist presumption against a general glorification; that is just what we are combating.

The big problem, holding back consciousness of this view, was always that of "sins", of a postulated moral universe (alongside the actual one) where infinite and hence indelible offences were committed daily. Rather as Aristotle rated a little of contemplation as worth more than the whole range of non-intellectual goods, so here the smallest *inhonestas* made life no longer worth living. If a lust for vengeance played its role in the formation of these conceptions historically, then a first step in teaching us to receive without the despair of rage, with *forgiveness*, the wrongs that are done us was to imagine the Lord as righting all wrongs and readjusting the scales. He says "Vengeance is mine, I will repay". This would still have to be reflected in his image and likeness however, and so we get, in the Latin Christian tradition, the virtue of *vindicatio*.

But later we are taught that God, which is to say reality, does not take vengeance. God forgives, and more than we do. Ultimately, the person besieged also by this kind of evil, this deficiency or deformity of his free action, suffers, and that more deeply than do cripples and the rest. And so to deal with it we have the Christian remedy, the glorified wounds of Christ,

the sins nailed to the Cross, so that our "sins" too can be glorified as transferred to him who was "made sin for us".

The question has to arise whether we cannot and should not also be made sin for ourselves, perhaps as a response to this Christian vision, rather than in denial of it. "Greater things than I shall you do..." As Eckhardt teaches, one can accept and love all that one has done, I mean the fact, the truth, that one has done it, even as one moves away from it (one notion of "repentance"). We write loving autobiographies. This is the opposite of wishing to do the same things again, for there one still sees them as good. I am speaking of deeds seen now as bad, as privations, as failures. I lovingly and gladly accept that I failed to help my parents when I was younger and I talk to them about it. I have no special interest in establishing that I did not *culpably* fail. The impulse to self-justification is what Christianity, for example, was concerned to wipe out. It is legalistic and sociomorphic. We are what we are and must learn to glory in that, like the birds that sing, but who also make their efforts in learning to fly. There is no reason why these ideas should not be applied to the great killers of history, they too. Something like this no doubt lies behind de Sade's suggestion that everyone should have rights over everyone's bodies. It was his way of hinting that rights do not belong in nature. They do however belong in law just as long as we choose to protect the weak and others in this way as part of our vision of happiness.

An objection, to the view advanced here, that death is chimerical, might seem to be that at least half the human race experience the cessation of a main vital function, that needed for reproduction, "in the midst of life".

Otherwise, and as touching the resurrection, a long sleep is not felt. *A fortiori*, centuries of being dead are not felt. Here indeed it is "every man a penny", be he Plato or Wittgenstein, and in this way too time, before and after, is neutralised. That it was found necessary to teach that the (separated) souls of the redeemed were in heaven *now* depended upon the needs of those still on earth. But is such needed, any longer, whether or not we appeal to relativity theory? The eternal future is already and has always been present and actual. This is the meaning of predestination, of "sitting with Christ in the heavenly places" and so on. If the dead go "out of time" then they are neither now nor not now. Again, we find a fusion of the ideal and the actual, while, looking in reverse, this life is eternally contemplated or repeated. We are there now, while we are here, and when we are there we will not lose "here".

CHAPTER ONE

Faith as Thinking with Assent

One finds this criticism of "neothomism", that it simply asserts that reason will never go against faith. Where it seems to do so we just know that our reasoning has gone wrong somewhere. The openness necessary for the discovery of truth is here lacking, comments John MacQuarrie (*Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, London 1971, SCM; ch. 18, sect.89).

The Thomist position, however, might rather mean that we will never be asked to believe something unreasonable. Here the view sets no restriction whatever upon thinking. It rather makes a statement about the nature of Christian belief, containing an implicit invitation to think the data of revelation through so that the (rational) necessity of it can be seen. Yet this statement is also one, again, positive, about the nature of man and his thinking.

What we do find in Thomas Aquinas himself is a doctrine that reason naturally needs a (supernatural) guidance which it must trust and rely on, as the tides need the moon. Whether or not this guidance should ever be construed as a limit is at least an open question, however, though it clearly was in the system under which Aquinas himself lived. Yet the whole event of revelation, as is more proper to just the idea of a revelation, can rather be seen as a great opening up.

There is, besides, a conceptual difficulty in the idea of truths beyond the reach of reason. The original postulate of a harmony between faith and reason, if thought through, might seem to demand revision of this and some related ways of understanding "supernatural" truths. Therefore one might ask, in the opposite direction (not necessarily the other "extreme"), whether they might not all be assimilable to those truths that Thomas says are revealed only because too few men with too great time and difficulty would attain to their discovery. the claim therefore is that they are accessible to reason. Unfortunately there is a tendency here, hardly discouraged by Thomas, to reduce revelation to declaring to people what they should believe. It is as if revelation as a notion is always slipping down and away from the original richness of an epiphany.

Once revealed truths are accepted their superior rationality becomes clear, as the Christian Trinity, it is claimed, is a superior and more viable conception than that of Allah. However, if we concede that some philosopher has shown that a solitary divine person is inconceivable, there seems no reason in principle why another philosopher might not postulate, or urge as probable, either a plurality of divine persons or the operation of relations within the divinity, equivalent to thought-*processes* perhaps, or both.

Reason in any case has and has had a great task presented to it by dogmas such as that of the Trinity, as the early example of Augustine illustrates. Nor have reasonable and unreasonable ways of understanding this mystery (which the dogma sought to identify) yet been exhaustively distinguished. As with Christology, the careful choice of official wording can never fully conceal that many earlier understandings of these mysteries, inclusive of those with the highest sanction, get contradicted. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is another example. There is no telling, to take a further example, how far a richer, more philosophically cogent notion of eternity might go in modifying the doctrines and dogmas of the creation of the world "in time" or of the "pre-existent" Christ (Cf. H. McCabe, *God Matters*).

The discovery, and it is no less, of evolution is a more obvious example still of how reason is compelled to reinterpret "supernatural" truths, rather than to submit to their dictation in the way envisaged in earlier Thomism. Doctrines of the soul and special interventionistic creation are under great pressure to give way to what to many seems a grander conception. In this

conception the emergence of man in God's image and even of Christ as definitive God-man is seen as built into creation from its first instant or, in terms of the Hegelian dialectic, from its first postulate (we do not need to make our temporal mode of perception essential to the process or structure).

Here we need to relate these ideas to the historical development within Christendom. The original impulse to definitions of dogma came very largely from the secular authority, desirous at best of preserving peace within his or her realm, at worst of bending Christian belief in a more manageable direction, inclusive of altering power-structures within the Church to harmonize with such factors as, perhaps, the Imperial move to Constantinople or the general dominance of men over women in society, this latter coinciding with the gradual reduction of an original metaphor of sacrifice to a more literal sacrifice-theology in harmony with previous Roman religious practice and a felt need for the offering of sacrifice for the temporal security of state and society (Cf. Damien Casey...).

Thus it is only by a rather doubtful analogy that the meeting, three centuries earlier almost, at Jerusalem described in Luke's *Acts* can be seen as the first of a series of ecumenical councils. Nor did it define any dogma, the main achievement being that people met and learned to understand one another. Instead, some rather minimal disciplinary measures protective of Jewish sensibilities were passed, minimal in that they did not distinguish between moral and ritual desiderata ("abstain from fornication and things strangled"). Such distinction had been a main point of Christ's teaching, however, at least as this is recorded in the then still to be written Gospels.

Discussions about faith and reason and their relation as traditionally conducted relate to these dogmas. Today such discussion often centres around the *interpretation* of dogmatic formulae. This is clearly part of an attempt to make dogma consonant with reason, rather than the other way round (though there, obviously, there would be no question of "making": the harmony of faith and reason is itself "dogmatic" in form). One can thus go so far as to find a given formulation infelicitous or misleading, never needing to say it is wrong.

Examples here are legion, and here we are not repeating the examples of in-depth intellectual penetration of elements of faith (not necessarily "articles") discussed above. We are examining the more superficial but historically acute phenomenon of reservations and revisions with regard to entrenched verbal credal propositions.

The faith-reason presumption is perhaps that such formulations can always be "saved" (one speaks of "saving the appearances"). But it is not always so. Not a few theologians, it is plain, are unable to take the more recent Marian dogmas seriously, while Hans Küng thinks that nobody should be obliged to believe in the virgin birth, a doctrine which anyhow wears a different face, so to speak, now that we know that the woman contributes half of the genetical constituents of the new human being. Jesus might seem in danger of being seen more as a Marian clone than as one begotten of God. The Immaculate Conception, too, only retains its sense so long as we adhere to a literalist Augustinian view of "original sin" fast vanishing from our comprehension. These considerations in turn demand reassessment of papal infallibility as defined in council and even a critique of the rational provenance of this notion as such, for which Küng suggests "indefectibility" should be substituted when speaking of the Church, as expressing no more than our confidence in Christ's presence among those who trust in him as long as life, theirs individually or that of the world, lasts.

But the two concerns, with formulae and with realities, do eventually merge. Believers confess *resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi saeculi* and a second coming in glory *judicare vivos et mortuos*. Here already in the pages of scripture we find interpretation, e.g. in John's Gospel: "and this is the judgment, that men preferred darkness to light... because their works were evil." We may see this as part of the ongoing effort, showing that confidence in reason that Aquinas makes explicit, to make the tradition intelligible, first to a wider

audience, then to ourselves. One can hardly deny that a kind of spiritual imperialism ("salvation is of the Jews", John represents Jesus as saying) underlies the development of Paul's thought, leading him to abrogate the Law, to interpret Christ's death as a destruction of the Law itself, upon which Jewish exclusivity had been based. This leads to an intensification of the cosmic, universally mutual community of acceptance and forgiveness recorded as preached in Christ's own life. Paul solves his own problems by seeing the Old Testament, his "Bible", as more suitable for interpretation than for simple acceptance. "These things happened in a figure" and so on, a method later on attributed much more comprehensively, however, to the protagonist of the Gospels himself. Thus, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up..."

At its highest point, though, such interpretation as it were negates itself, becoming the means to a more deeply inspired literalism, as in the (probably authentic) argument for resurrection from God's identifying himself to Moses, in the "inspired" page, as the God of Abraham and Isaac, who had died. Yet God is God of the living, *ergo*... Awareness of resurrection though is not here necessarily attributed to the Mosaic writer himself.

Belief in resurrection had been reached by pre-Christian Jews in a rational process, arguing from the consistency of divine justice in a way echoed by Kant and even Plato, starting out from a dualist anthropology. It is reason too which exerts pressure within theology away from a materialistically "miraculous" view of the accounts of Christ's own resurrection. Such pressure is not necessarily reductionist. "Even if we knew him in the flesh we know him so no longer." Indeed, with the eclipse of dualistically spiritualist anthropologies by the monistic evolutionary record a confidence in resurrection or its equivalent (what?) beyond death, of course by the divine will or second creation, appears more clearly as a simple religious and moral response to human existence and community feeling, a basic intuition not other than Julian's "All shall be well" in the fourteenth century. Again, the interpretation passing from *after* to *beyond* death, from a later time to an exit from time, begins in Scripture. Thus Martha knows that all will rise "at the last day" (John's Gospel). Jesus replies "I am the resurrection", so death is already conquered, goodness knows how. *Omnis qui vivit et credit in me non morietur in aeternum*. The *et credit in me* need not be seen as a restriction but more as explication of *vivit*.

The appearance of Christ and his message, as indeed the appearance of man and his eternal destiny derivable from his intellectual nature, has to be seen as written into evolutionary history from the beginning. Obscurely, this already lies behind the difference between Scotus and Aquinas as to whether the divine purpose of incarnation was consequent upon sin merely. The historicization of sin in the apparently contingent tale of a Fall in Eden has obscured the necessity, a necessity of divine perfection of love, of the development, perhaps best charted by Hegel who, incidentally, offers us an interpretation of the *Genesis* story (hardly an account) difficult to improve upon (*Encyclopaedia, Logic* 24). Here spirit and determinate nature are as it were naturally at war with one another, even though man is of course also naturally inclined to live reasonably, to order his (other) inclinations. The advent of reflection, Hegel argues,

involves a thorough-going disruption, and viewed in that light, might be regarded as the source of all evil and wickedness - the original transgression.

The spiritual, he says, "sunders itself to self-realisation".

But this position of severed life has in its turn to be suppressed, and the spirit has by its own act to win its way to concord again.

Hegel adds that while "we" accept the dogma of Original Sin we must give up seeing it as consequential upon an accidental act of the first man. He might have added that *a fortiori* then we must give up doctrines of the original preternatural gifts and of the "wounds" of original sin unless, again, suitably reinterpreted.

For Hegel "the theological doctrine of original sin is a profound truth" and he has only sarcasm for the "modern enlightenment" which "prefers to believe that man is naturally good... so long as he continues true to nature." There is of course a terminological problem here. For Hegel it is natural for man to feel the call to strive with his spirit against the too easy path, and Aquinas's account of *lex naturalis*, inclusive of the virtues naturally needed for *ardua*, difficult things, says the same.

This might seem obvious. The effect, however, is that sin is demythologized to something natural and to that extent necessary. It is no longer an offence both infinite and gratuitous, placing us under divine wrath. Such wrath is rather a moment in a dialectic, as indeed the very idea of a salvation *history* seems already to suggest. Catholics have sometimes decried this tendency to equate createdness with sinfulness as a Lutheran aberration. It was this, one might concede, so long as the idea of sin retained its full Augustinian force. Read the other way, however, we have here little more than the Thomistic dictum that "what can fail sometimes does".

What is important for Hegel is the uncovering of rational necessity behind what religion presents, in narrative fashion, as merely contingent, contingency being of the essence of narrative and narrative being of the essence of a "salvation history", such as Christianity or Judaism, but not Islam, presents us with.

It is claimed here that the Thomistic postulation of a harmony between faith and reason is detachable from a restrictive ecclesial-disciplinary context. With creeds and dogmas is associated a passing over from affirmative proclamation itself identical with belief to a limiting definition of what is believed itself identical with a command as to what *shall be* believed, since whoever denies it is *anathema*, i.e. accursed.

The idea of a reason out of harmony with the creeds and therefore erroneous was anyhow too simple where it ignored, unthomistically, the fact that one thinks from a certain point of view, as good is pursued in every action. Thus the criticisms of modern atheism have been progressively assimilated by today's believers and Nietzsche, wishing to be the "Antichrist", becomes, even in his own estimation, "the crucified". Not only does all reasoning lead to the Good News but reasoning itself continuously purifies and reinterprets it, revealing even an unsuspected necessity. This necessity indeed is why there is and can be no restriction upon reason. Reason cannot be guided and controlled by faith, as can a given individual's thinking. But where what I had taken on faith shows itself to me, after careful consideration of course, as unworthy of reason then I no longer believe it, but either reinterpret or reject the content. It is sometimes difficult to say which of these we do. Thus a certain interpretation of *extra ecclesia nulla salus* (Council of Florence 1439) is rejected (even by Rome in the 1950s), yet the dogma still expresses the truth of a common spiritual life in the community of love for which we were born.

It is a matter of a historical passage from division to unity, from duality, of creator and created, grace and nature, reason and faith, to the one order which reason reflects, reconciling necessity and freedom.

As soon as you are in the world of love or goodness there is hardly any sense in opposing freedom and necessity (Georges van Riet, "The Problem of God in Hegel", *Philosophy Today* Summer 1967, XI, 2/4, p.88).

Under this dualism, of sacred and secular, lived Thomas Aquinas, Joan of Arc (where the strain was showing) and medieval man, as we call him, in general. For many it is *the* Catholic attitude, to which Newman liked to present himself as converting, *all* his beliefs now depending upon the infallibility of the church to which he had submitted. This can seem at once sophisticated subtlety and the purest simplicity, being in fact a total abdication. If all theologians simply submitted to the Church there could be no theology, nor could there ever have arisen a church in the first place. We need, again, the idea of interpretation, which is creative, like the writings of St. Paul and those of Newman himself. Of course traditionally, as in "neothomism", one operated in a sort of halfway-house, where this or that was decided, and hence matter for submission (to a "*magisterium*"), while one was theologically free for what remained, though only if one did not contradict the former "truths", i.e. true propositions, as a "certain nucleus of doctrine" (MacQuarrie). Here though one lacked that "radical openness necessary for the discovery of truth" and hence compatible with and needed for the love of truth. For reason, as dialectical, everything is revisable or can appear as such through being capable of being improved upon, in a yet deeper interpretation. In mystical literature this has always been recognized.

In fact we have experienced how the Church herself has recognized this, as Catholic theologians take to themselves the fruits of centuries of research by their Protestant colleagues. The revolution has extended to the Church's own self-understanding. We can now see how despite formal excommunications the Christian ferment has continued in "separated brethren", that originally somewhat patronizing phrase (a variant upon "non-Catholics") now becoming accepted as applying to all communities. Nor is this position contradictory of acceptance of the "Petrine office". Peter too can be in the wrong camp at times, as St. Paul long ago made clear. We should accept him (*tu es Petrus*) while requiring that he accept us, so that we need never say "Get thee behind me Satan", as so many have felt compelled to do, rightly or wrongly, from Jesus up to, it would appear, the Shia Moslems (if America, as "the great Satan", is a historical fruit of an original Roman mission to, say, Canterbury). But the Shia too will not stick fast in this *impasse* of interpretation forever. They have not yet perhaps begun to engage in those conscious dialectical exchanges of "subjective" spirit with which we Westerners are at home, but the same spirit, thinking itself, is at work in their history too, "objectively", as part of the whole.

This "objective" part of the process is found in our history also and I mentioned earlier the need to relate our speculations to that history. The (partial) negation of the Catholic faith-command system at the Reformation was in turn negated in the Baroque period through into the apogee of the Romantic restorations, and we are now witnessing reintegration. The Protestants and humanists, we might hazard, are now vindicated as being often the Church's truest sons. We may look forward to a similar rapprochement with Eastern Christianity, the frequent superiority of whose insights is tacitly acknowledged in Aquinas's so thoroughly Latin writings. Beyond that one can raise the question of an integration with Islamic views and the Jewish Christian theology, eclipsed by political annihilation and Greek speculation generally. A straw in the wind here, Hans Küng points out, is that Vatican II implicitly accords to Mohammed the status of prophet, while years ago the supposedly reactionary Belloc treated Islam as simply a Christian heresy like, in his eyes, Protestantism. After that, or concurrently, we may witness and work for assimilation, which as mutual becomes integration, of and with "far eastern" world views, a process already maturing well in Japan in particular, but also in India and China.

The phenomenon of individual "conversions" can acquire in the light of these perspectives an at times rather negative quality. I am mainly concerned with conversions to Roman Catholicism. In the Baroque period, even during the Reformation itself, they clearly bear an aspect at least of political conservatism, of tenderness for a departed order. Nor is there much

doubt that Catholic missionary activity is often partly motivated by a wish to make up the numbers, and therefore the power, lost to the dissident groups which have always developed with time in areas where the church is more established. This was even true of England and Germany, Augustine and Boniface responding to Byzantine coolness toward the Papacy as others not much later did to the massive centuries-long Islamic siege. When, later, the Portuguese came ashore first in India and said they were looking for Christians they did not only mean the separated disciples of St. Thomas. A rearguard crusade with an army of new recruits is more what they had in mind, and Francis Xavier was for a while a most effective tool, a stress on the necessity of baptism serving both parties, the political and the mystical, rather well.

There is no intention here to deny the properly Gospel motive of such proclamations, easily descending though it does, among more primitive peoples, to mere proselytizing backed up by what can seem to the miracles. Still, failure at home promotes renewed effort abroad, in Church as in state.

Thus Thomas More, not a convert of course, yet a prime case of martyrdom for individual conscience, in part died protesting loyalty to the hitherto established order. "I die the King's good servant; but God's first." That the point at which the established order was questioned was that of a marriage is purely incidental, though certainly the right to change partners (or churches) is widely accepted today, and is distinguished in both cases from the "whoring" condemned by the Old Testament prophets.

The "ideology" behind the conversions, the dogma backing up their political stance, and one does not need to be a Marxist to see it in that way, was belief that the Roman Church was the church founded by Christ, the one true church. The Protestants countered with their doctrine of an invisible church. This idea has lately gained more and more acceptance among Catholics, to the point where the idea of a visible institutional church, never formally given up, becomes in everyone's perception relegated more and more to the sidelines. One began by speaking of those who are invisibly members of this visible Church, as it were halfway to self-contradiction, then of a "baptism of desire" so extensive as to render actual baptism a mere form, then of anonymous Christians, an originally liberal expression in intention but now seen as insulting to those who do not regard themselves as Christians of any kind.

That these or similar developments or at least that development as such was bound to occur was a well-kept secret until it became acute for John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman nearly two centuries ago now. Yet it was already implicit in Augustine's definition of faith, of believing, offered at the end of his life, as "thinking with assent" (*De praedestinatione sanctorum* 2.5, PL44.963: "*credere nihil aliud est quam cum assensione cogitare*"). For thinking is a movement, a process. The retirement of the orthodox, after the first few generations, behind ritualized credal repetitions was from the first in conflict with the thinking which, says Augustine, just is believing, so that in that way living faith is inevitably an irritant. To think of something, especially thinking of it continually, is to be ever transforming it.

Attempts at reconciliation, of thinking and creed, were mainly restricted to mysticism. For we have seen how even in Thomism the theologian was barred from thus thinking what was defined or canonized. Well, the official Church later came even to canonize people! The process allowed or tolerated within mystical life and literature, however, in the Church, is not philosophical or sapiential in the normal sense. Rather, one begins with the verbal formula and stays there, attempting to go behind it into dark regions of unutterability. According to St. John of the Cross these are to the credal statements, inviolable as these are, as gold to silver. A variant on this, or one way of expressing it, is the constant repetition of a phrase such as is noted in the *Philokalia*, along with the teaching that this will bring enlightenment.

Repetitiveness, we know, can be life-giving or enhancing. It is the method, in music, of many composers, such as Schubert, but it is not thinking. If there is process, if mystics do get anywhere, then it is at the cost of thinking, though the surprisingly insightful remarks orthodox mystics have often come out with lead one to think that they do a lot of thinking on the quiet anyway.

It is this *process* of consenting thinking which is faith which we are claiming has a naturally centrifugal, uniting tendency, thus lending the requisite necessity of fulfilment to the Dominical prayer, *ut omnes unum sint*. The definition also confirms our opposition here to the idea, even Thomist it might seem, of faith as a limitation upon reason, an idea demanding two orders of truth, such as Augustine too firmly espoused, though this definition demolishes such a possibility in principle.

For it is reason itself, thinking with assent again, that profoundly modifies faith. Therefore there is only one order. Faith *is* reason. Why then did Augustine and others think that there were two orders, two sources of truth, philosophy and authority as Augustine says (*De ordine* II.5.16; PL32.1002)? Well, there are the enquirer's first encounters with the believers and their leaders. This *can* be construed as coming across an authority. It is an authority in that case coming from God, from the invisible world, not from any political or legislative source in the normal sense, so the idea of authority is here used analogously. There is even a hint of the primitively magical, of seeing the spiritual principle or God as literally a king (and thus "of this world"), what Berdyaev would call sociomorphism.

For in reality this encounter is subjectively the same as, or very similar to, encountering a new book. The enquirer, like the reader, is free at every moment to proceed further or to withdraw, shut the book (contrary to what I said in "On Being So Placed", *New Blackfriars*, September 1980). If one becomes convinced of its value, and this is what is called, by a certain presumption, the gift of faith, then one determines, maybe even binds oneself, to read on. In the Christian or religious case one will read on, go on thinking with assent, for a lifetime at least (hence the saying that the world cannot contain the books that could be written about what Jesus said and did).

What Augustine obscurely understood, with his *fides quaerens intellectum*, and to a large extent practised, comes first fully into the light in Hegel's philosophy. There it becomes plain that we are not dealing with occasional exercises, as with Anselm's speculation (already pointing to the future in its stress on eliminating not just doubt but the possibility of doubt). We are dealing rather with the living substance of reason which is faith where reason assents anew to what it has once accepted. All conversions are in this sense "intellectual". Maybe reason accepted on authority more than it could "see" for itself. But this is something quite normal for reason, as it is Augustine's merit too to have pointed out. For him religious faith differs from other knowledge and philosophy on the side of the object believed, not in the kind of knowledge, a view reaching back to Justin Martyr and beyond. We may be sure, anyhow, that the faithful mind will strive to *think* what is thus accepted, as Hegel does with the trinity and the creation, following indeed in Augustine's footsteps. Hegel's bias, however, is in favour of bringing out the ultimate necessity, for reason, of what is thus believed, whereas Augustine, more superficially perhaps, would rather stress a contingent character in the believed articles as depending more entirely upon an initiative hidden from us. Yet it must be that God is necessarily a trinity if he is such at all, and the world proceeds from that necessity of love which is one with freedom, as the Hegelian dialectic will establish.

After Thomas More we mentioned, discussing conversions, Cardinal Newman. The assessment of the greatness, or less than greatness, of this figure, as he has become, depends, it seems to me, upon his view of what he was doing in "submitting" to the Roman Church. Was he, in a word, looking backwards or forwards? Well, we should remember that he took the step in unity with an explicit confidence in development, such as we have been discussing,

even if he accorded only a more restricted legitimacy to the process, not recognizing, for example, the contributions made by "heretical" groups. He may have seen the Church as the true home of development, might have agreed with Henri de Lubac that Catholicism is not just a religion, but "religion itself". Yet the notion of a "true home" of just development and its defining openness is restrictive, perhaps equivocal or contradictory of itself in genuine Hegelian fashion.

Perceptions have changed, regarding not so much heresy (though that too) as the heretical person, in what is itself a development, perhaps a meta-development, of the dialectically interpretative kind which we have been discussing here. The word has a root meaning of choice (*hairesis*), reflecting the concern, even horror, of the first close-knit Christian communities at those who appeared to pick out from the common *tradita* just what suited them individually, besides adding personal touches of their own. But we have made it clear that there is no possibility, where belief (thinking with assent) is alive, of not doing this. There are of course socially or communally imposed limits, more stringent in one age than in another, something stressed by Newman when he meditated upon "opportuneness", a distinctly pragmatic category and hence open and liberal at least potentially. It was at any rate hardly illiberal of him to wish to forestall a definition of papal infallibility under this pragmatic rubric. One can wonder, anyhow, how deeply such pragmatism entered into the overall structure of his beliefs, as when he said in effect that if and when the doctrine is dogmatized then we shall have to believe it. Such belief, as lying under the compass of a person's will, easily degenerates into an ideological system in the sense of a tool for domination, built up of the things we must *say* or "confess", whatever we may think, thus destroying the ground-idea of belief we have found in Augustine. But these tendencies in the concepts themselves need not be attributed to Newman personally, with his quite distinct background, which included, for example, an early Tractarian attachment to the idea of the *arcana Dei* as lying among the Church's patrimony, such *arcana* including of necessity not only practices but also doctrines it could be advisable or just more devotionally respectful not to proclaim publicly. Support for such a now unfashionable view was adduced from the Pauline distinction between milk for babies and meat for adults in the faith. On such a view the Pope might well without contradiction be considered as having done better if he had kept his putative infallibility to himself!

Newman, anyhow, was open to development, presumably without limit, and so we can interpret his conversion as a step forward in the dialectic of fuller understanding, while recognizing that he saw the liberalism of his time chiefly in a negative light, as destructive of all belief. We do ourselves need to ask how the developing, all-comprehensive project of interpretation destined to take in all peoples, which is the Church, is to be distinguished from such liberalism. Alternatively, were Newman and others, such as Pope Gregory XVI, in the encyclical *Mirari vos*, wrong about liberalism?

The liberalism Newman wished to condemn "overthrows the nature of opinion" (*Mirari vos*), reducing assent to assertion as free choice (*hairesis* again) of an individual no longer seeking to know truth, in unity with it if not necessarily in submission to it, but only to assert himself. We may certainly see liberalism's emergence as a dialectical revenge upon those, including Augustine, who wished to see truth exclusively in terms of a submission, an act of justice rather than of spontaneous love, or without the leaven of such love at least, since justice too is good. Finding the truth must in the end coincide with being at home with oneself, as Hegel expresses it.

The true, interpretational view, on the contrary, never loses sight of the fact, the truth, that enquiry is a search for the other in its true and undiminished integrity, even if at the end of the day it would wish to confess that such a goal lies ultimately at the heart of the enquirer's own

personal being or self. What is decisive is the predominance of intellect, of thought, over will, a key Thomistic thesis.

For Newman then progress, the future, even "the life of the world to come", lay with the organized Catholic Church *rather than* the somewhat petrified Protestant sects of his day. A problem was that religious *praxis* was out of tune and sympathy with modern secular civilization, and this raised difficulties for Newman's pronounced *piety*. In the Catholic world, by contrast, the Church and the clergy still dominated. In the end we shall have to reserve judgment about Newman's conversion. He certainly felt that Rome always has been and always would be right. How he would have reacted to Dostoyevsky's parable of the Grand Inquisitor we do not know.

Closely allied to the idea of heresy is that of heterodoxy, the following of *another* teaching. We have found that often what is heterodox later becomes orthodox, is synthesised or assimilated, sometimes with at least an appearance of replacing previous views, as in the modern Church's espousal of the French revolutionary ideals (affirmed as Gospel-derived by Maritain sixty years ago, however).

The upshot of all this is that we are, to borrow a phrase of Wordsworth's, confronted with "the workings of one mind". As for mind, thinking, it is surely more natural to think with assent than to withhold assent from one's thoughts. Faith then, as Augustine defined it, is a most natural thing, the natural attitude we might say. being so natural, it cannot form a separate order "above" reason. For what can really be above reason if it is with respect to his reason that man is in the divine image? "Above" is clearly a metaphor, perhaps for what reason is not yet in a position to know. Conversely, everything is *shown* to reason, the "passive" intellect, by what is outside it, as nature, or just being alive, declares God, and in this way too we have just one order, where everything is given as to a believer. Again, the dogmas of faith seem all to be no more than a class of things we cannot *yet* see unless told of them by others more privileged. When we see God we shall certainly see that God is, necessarily, a trinity, if indeed the dogma has so exhaustively captured the intra-divine life. We have after all our just reservations about Chalcedon (a parallel with the Nicene and other trinitarian definitions) and so we should be open to the possibility of fresh winds of interpretation making a future understanding with those seeing themselves at present as non-trinitarians a more hopeful project. This again would not be a matter of abandoning anything so much as of putting things in a better way. The foreseen development is hardly likely to be more radical than Aquinas's assertion that *ipsae relationes sunt personae*, which many might wish to assert retains only the name of person without its substance, to say nothing of Augustine's earlier but even bolder revolution in Trinitarian thought.

The same meta-interpretation could be given of Rahner's view of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, viz. that the removal of a certain magical, that is to say unintelligible, element is not equivalent to a reduction of the doctrine, just as the appearance of human soul and intellect, having by its nature an eternal destiny, is not reduced when one claims an emergence for it in the natural because unified unfolding of evolution. Rather, one enhances one's perceptions of the natural, of nature, itself as proceeding from the divine thinking *ab initio* (cf. van Riet, above). So much then for faith and reason. As John Paul II said recently, they are two wings. But the only two wings that are of any use or truth are a pair which sit on one bird and flap together as one where either of them is alive at all.

CHAPTER TWO

Trinitarian Philosophy

"When I was a child I thought as a child," St. Paul tells us. The grandeur of his thought lies in this, that he only refers to his individual life here so as to contrast life in this age with that of eternity, when "I shall know as I am known". Still, when he was himself a child he did not know that, come to maturity, he would put away what he then thought.

When I myself was a child, for my part, I had an intuition to which I feel I can no longer appeal. I felt then that I did not know why I, just I, existed. It seemed I was chosen as one of a finite number, and indeed this awareness lies behind doctrines of predestination, being called and, just therefore, "justified". Already in one's natural feeling of individuality one sensed the contradiction, that if, namely, one lived in a society of alien individuals, finite in number, then one was alien to oneself. One had either to deny these other selves or become them, discover that one had always been, was essentially, one with them. Already here though one would pass from finitude, the limited number of individuals, to the universal. Here too, already, the absoluteness of time is denied. One had yet to discover what one is essentially, though this imply that one never was an ignorant child. St. Paul puts away childish things to the extent that he, St. Paul, as he had become, never was a child, even if he had once "materially" been it. Infinity, that is, does not perhaps change the past, as Peter Damien required, but it negates it. It negates pastness.

Of him whom faith confesses as God-man, however, we have record as a child. One may wish to imagine him then, too, feeling thus alien, "thrown" into life, but one cannot, since this thought contradicts itself. Or, if he too comes upon his necessity as discovering it, then we are no different in that respect at least. We discover our unity, our vicarious substitutability, with all rational beings and others besides. This is in virtue of the universal, of the reason that is our consciousness, our thinking.

This absolute reason or spirit was represented in earlier times as the theory of a "common" intellect. Against this it does not though seem sufficient merely to counter that "it is evident that it is this man who thinks" (Aquinas). For this evidence is, again, merely the natural sense of individuality which, as philosophy discovers from the time of Heracleitus, is not merely productive of contradiction but is in contradiction with itself. It is for this reason that the same Thomas Aquinas can allow that more than one individual human nature can be hypostatically assumed (*Summa theologiae* IIIa 3, 7 ad 2um), as it is also why the absolute religion can turn upon nothing less than the deification, necessary as declaring the essence, of man taken universally. The dignity Christians acknowledge is objective. Thus intellect is not common, as if fortuitously, to a finite group of individuals, thus become as it were a bunch of clones, but necessarily universal and thus transcendent, man, any man or woman, being *capax Dei*.

It is a matter of seeing things from the divine or absolute point of view. The effort to do this is what distinguishes philosophy and, indeed, science. For God, indeed, there is none other, except otherness as it may be found within his own rationality, through which alone, it will be claimed here, can absolute reason either think itself or within that thinking think every possible "contraction" (Nicholas of Cusa) of itself which might be called creature.

Some⁵ complain of this approach, trying to take the absolute viewpoint, that it falls short of affirming the ontological reality of created things. We reply that this reality is not to be accounted for by an analogy of being which would enslave the absolute to our linguistic

⁵ E.g. C. Bruaire, *L'être et l'esprit*, Paris PUF 1983; Richard Gildas, "Examen critique du jugement de Hegel sur la notion de création *ex nihilo*" (article on the Internet, posted 2002).

categories merely. Once it is seen that this analogy declares our being to be analogous only, and not God's, who alone simply is, then the game is up. We exist *in* God or not at all (St. Paul again). Thus when Aquinas affirms that God knows his creatures only in his thought of them and not in themselves it follows that they therefore *are* not in themselves. Here he commits himself without saying (we need not say without seeing) so to absolute idealism, as it later became. This is underscored when he declares each of these ideas or thoughts of things identical with the divine knower's essence (*Summa theol.* Ia 15). What are these ideas, Cusanus as good as asks, but the various diffusive contractions of infinite goodness? So of course those of them that are or become conscious must thereby come to realise the identity of their consciousness and reason with the absolute, since this is the way of truth?

There is no reason, furthermore, for these ideas to be intentional of being, as are our finite thoughts. Being too is an idea to which infinity contracts itself, ceaselessly and beyond recall, though freely. This explains why it is said, by Eckhart and others, that God does not, cannot, exist in separation from ourselves, whom he has "loved with an everlasting love". Ours is an eternal and truly divine idea, not as constitutive of God's reality, like the one divinely begotten Word, but as thought by God in the freedom of eternity to which, however, as thinker beyond all shadow of hesitation, he is necessarily related in identity. This is at once vocation, predestination and justification. In this setting alone is human freedom to be explained. In the divine mind we and all our actions are conceived as free and this, the solution of Aquinas, is enough, again within the position that to ourselves, apart from the (divine) idea, there is no real relation, i.e. we are not real, if infinity is infinity.

It would seem that scientific explanation today approaches ever more closely to this absolute idealist framework. Thus the Big Bang theory, more forcefully than the *Genesis* account, reflects the dialectic in which the categories of reality are spun out of reason with inner necessity, beginning with undifferentiated being. In this analogous case one begins with a lump of high density undifferentiated matter, though this seems an oxymoron. Matter becomes indeed self-contradictory in the latest physical theories.

However it is attachment to the notion of matter, as "material" or "stuff", which has led to that total perversion of Aristotelian hylomorphism found in traditional theologies of the soul as "infused" into pre-existing matter, as if matter without form could actually be anything receptive of infusion or anything else, or as if soul were a para-material thing. The same model is applied to the genesis of man himself. One seeks to determine at which point in the creature's evolution a soul was infused such as would constitute it as in the divine image and likeness, a sea-change hardly likely to disturb those hominid recipients in their vital and desperate hunting activities. The point sought however is evanescent, though not merely because, as Teilhard de Chardin remarked, beginnings will ever elude us. The point is dialectical, rather. Spirit is projected historically as constituting man in self-contradiction because the dialectic or logic into which absolute spirit contracts for our perception and assimilation itself proceeds by, itself *is*, the progressive surmounting of contradiction in the "return". This is an eternal return indeed, though ever-present and not as repeated myth or narrative, of all things finite to their negation which is self-transcendence in the one truth (*reditus*).

At first, therefore, the idea of an "infusion", quietly put aside, was replaced by the palaeontological observation that *homo sapiens*, or maybe *homo sapiens sapiens*, appeared with startling suddenness. Well, it will maybe always be true, from our viewpoint within "nature" (itself however a "petrified intelligence" according to Schelling or Hegel), that intellect "comes from outside". This though is the Aristotelico-Platonic dualism of which Cartesianism was the extremest because last gasp. We have, therefore, to transcend this "natural" viewpoint, whether in faith or philosophy. This we fail to do when we delimit the spheres of reference of these two, intellect and nature. We must rather distinguish them by

their emphases, methods and provenance. Otherwise we have a closed system of natural causes attributed *post factum* to a totally transcendent "creator", which (whom) our own independent being then unhappily contradicts. Such an impossibly independent production is deemed more worthy of the producer and even seen as the emancipation of philosophy (and science) from religion. Philosophy though was ever free and ever religious.

There was of course the episode of *homo Neanderthalis*, possibly genetically unrelated to us, but human and so presumably "ensouled" all the same. But he was killed off and as it were murdered in his very idea (till the bones showed up), though kinship extends here beyond genetic abstractions to the proven community of work, art and culture.

Lately, however, our uniqueness as outsiders or lords in an alien realm is being further eroded, and to a qualitative degree. Evidence has been found of the humanity and spirituality also of *homo erectus*, the merely hominid predator who, far from simply parasitically feeding upon cadavers scorned by others (Lewis Binford's theory), subdued the whole earth it seems, establishing himself, to the tune, admittedly, of a putative six hundred thousand individuals merely, at every habitable point. Spearmarks upon bone and other relics indicate how he pursued the larger herbivores into the frostiest climes, constructing weapons often with a finish and beauty beyond utility. Whether this was to impress young females, like those astonishing avarian builders in Australasia, or due simply to his (her) innate reason and spirituality are hardly alternatives.

The qualitative difference made to our thinking, as to that upon which we think, consists, rather, in considering that the history of human spirituality and culture now seems to be required to be extended at least thirty-fold beyond the previous calculation of around forty thousand years. *Homo erectus* flourished for around two million years. "Mind and consciousness have much deeper roots than have been assumed."⁶

Already Teilhard de Chardin had summarised for us how some animals, in beginning to go upright, found paws, freed from other needs, developing into all-purpose hands. These freed the mouth and teeth from the pressing needs of defence or other such exercises of strength, so that speech could develop. Concurrently the relaxing and disappearance of the jaw muscles encircling and binding the skull released it for the expansion demanded by the brain inside it to develop its hundred thousand million nerve-cells in response to evolutionary pressure. Just so the skull itself had originated as an excrescence of the vertebral spine anticipating that same cerebral and spiritual future.

But even to Teilhard it was clear that no mechanist or blind Darwinian account could bring order into this astonishing *concursus causarum*, despite his talk at times of a life-force. The whole development was clearly being thought out, or rather was thinking itself out, according at least to our routine misperception which philosophy must of course correct. An infinite being, it is easily seen, will be transparent to itself at all points. That is no more than is meant by absolute self-consciousness. The dialectical unfolding we call logic is the human time-bound analogue of this.

Infinity is infinite synthesis, but it must also be, in itself, perfectly analysed, without darkness. The sense of mystery is a creaturely emotion only, which however we can be sure of retaining as long as we want it, since the want itself is the sense, as in other fields. In nature then spirit as perception, of itself or others, lets itself freely unroll or be manifested. We talk of thinking here in analogous extension of our own highest power and the merit of this is the connection with otherness in identity. For we define knowing and hence thinking or contemplating as the subject himself "having" the form of (being informed by) the other as other. This otherness in identity affords the link and necessary causal analogy with that otherness in identity which the divine nature itself must inwardly constitute as condition of ever thinking anything other than

⁶ Professor Dietrich Mania, Jena (Forschungsstelle Bilzingsleben bei Erfurt). Cf. *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 6/2.2.04, for a summary of this research.

itself at all. This is the superiority of this model over that of emanation rather than any clearly closer relation to divine freedom, which might after all be defensible on either model.

The consideration, incidentally, that God is not compelled to speak his Word, even though he constitutes himself in what is ineptly called the divine nature in so doing, gives the strongest incentive to avoid characterising God, infinity, in terms of being. For being is never separable from essence even where essence is finally identified with it. The absolute is primal freedom and in choosing itself it has chosen us too, "in him" as religion has it. This did not occur in some vanishing past. The "speaking" of it as I write, in an affirmation corresponding to my own, is absolute reality, identity in difference. This expression not merely gives no licence for but expressly refutes any charge that the Trinitarian processes and the *processio ad extra* (creation) plus the compensating *reditus* are confounded. Rather, it is their analogy alone which makes the latter process possible. This is underscored in the absolute religion of incarnation by the reference to a new creation, an *exitus* and *reditus* on the pattern of the old. This relational process is itself constitutive of that very speaking of the divine Word by which God is God. It is, that is to say, infinite and therefore necessary.

So we see the preparation for or indeed the very life of early man, or of man simply, stretching so much further back into "natural history", in a more seamless unity with it than we were previously able to imagine. Consequently it becomes clearer that what animates both him or us, each and all, and the whole striving evolving universe even now passing over, in consequence of spirit's necessary domination, from slow biological ascent to an intellectual convergence swift as thought, is one consciousness, absolute and without limit. Other accounts, more or less static and dualist, even where they promise a resolution divorced from all present experience, despite calls to "life in the spirit", fall away. But this is no new age. It has been open to every philosopher in his own time and each has seen it in his own way. His categories may now seem to us insufficient and unfree, but for him they opened the door to the ever new world to which we are all called, not indeed to be found across the Atlantic any more than at the tomb of the Saviour. The symphony played back to us from that world rather, its joyous rhythm, beckoning like the goddess and mother of us all, whose womb we never left, draws us ever on, back to our future, her ambrosial fragrance all about us.

The aim here, now becoming more prominent, is to underscore the necessity, also for philosophical consideration, of intra-divine relationships, be they Trinitarian or something similar merely. They must be of a kind expressible as identity in difference, that very relation, that is to say, in terms of which human cognition and intellectual life was classically analysed. More ambitiously, however, as fulfilling our practical needs as well, identity in difference can be presented as reconciliation, knowledge overcoming alienation. As far then as our present project is concerned, building, it is plain to see, on that of Hegel, it too can be characterised thus:

No dualism, not even a dualism of systems, can satisfy him. He aims at unity, not a flat unity, excluding difference, but a unity differentiating itself; for him true being is reconciliation.⁷

This view of Hegel's thinking as the apotheosis or simple making absolute of ecumenism ("true being is reconciliation") gives adequate background for presenting him as a philosopher

⁷ Georges van Riet, "The Problem of God in Hegel", *Philosophy Today*, 1967, p.86.

of the Trinity. He is not thereby a Trinitarian philosopher, as there are Trinitarian theologians. Augustine, all the same, is the clearest predecessor, in the West at least. Aquinas is maybe closer in respect of system and even of content, yet he follows a method, unknown to Augustine and rejected by Hegel, which is consciously theological, demanding a "dualism of systems". For the principle of reasonable authority included in Augustine's philosophizing was formalised by Aquinas into a methodical separation from it of "theology", one of Aristotle's names for metaphysics nonetheless.

Hegel will claim that the authority of reason itself negates that authority through which it conceived the possibilities it can now confirm.⁸ But Aquinas had no thought, in his time, of transcending the dualism, even if there are sufficient indications in his work prompting to a review of the traditional account of the two harmonised but formally separate spheres of faith and reason, as we have indicated in our first chapter here.

One might want to ask what it is that makes Trinitarianism an advance over simple monotheism. A solitary person, without relations is unthinkable, argued McTaggart in proof of atheism. The rejoinder appealing to the three persons⁹ is less than convincing if regard is paid to equivocations upon the term "person", however, and McTaggart may be otherwise answered. His claim, though, might still go to show that infinity would necessarily diffuse itself, in the freedom of love and goodness, as we have indicated above.

Pantheism, anyhow, has proved a repeated tendency of religious thinkers, seeking to avoid the surd of God and non-God, whereby the infinite is reduced to the finite since the latter is seen as having actuality independent of God. Here any attempt to present God as the All fails, floundering in apophatic fog.

The only thinkable solution, therefore, is a God containing this principle of otherness, instantiated in any creation, within himself. This is what Hegel realised in an exercise of pure reason, even if achieved through the experience of Christian tradition he had behind him.¹⁰ By birth and circumstances he was a Lutheran. That we have today an increasingly Hegelian Catholic theology, therefore, gives delayed credibility to the conciliar decree on ecumenism of forty years ago now.

Again, God, any true God, must contain, as a divine "moment", otherness or other-Being which is yet not outside himself, the divine unity. This situation is reflected in the ordinary process of human knowing, where the knower has in himself, as one with himself, the form of the other as other (Aquinas's Aristotelian formula), thus transcending any scheme of individual closed substances.

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One used, in the Catholic camp, to hear talk of Kant as "the St. Thomas of Protestantism". Hegel might rather claim that title, however, provided we make clear, firstly, that St. Thomas is not the exclusive property of post-Reformation Catholicism, secondly, that Hegel is by no means limited to his Lutheran "denomination".

We have been, often, unconscious of the pressure against any meeting of minds here, aggravating the already conscious exclusivisms of philosophers and theologians both, secular and sacred. Thus even Karl Rahner complained, in *Sacramentum Mundi* in the 1960s, that the

⁸ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa theol.* IIa-IIae 1, 5 for a similar view.

⁹ As in P.T. Geach's *Truth, Love and Immortality: An Introduction to McTaggart's Philosophy*, London 1979.

¹⁰ Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (tr. J. Baillie, pp. 750-785); *The Philosophy of Fine Art* (tr. F. Osmaston, vol. II, pp.297-324); *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, tr. E.B. Speirs and J. Burton Sanderson (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd.: London, 1895). The German originals of these and other texts are available in various editions.

doctrine of the Trinity had seen no development since the Council of Florence (1439). Here Hegel, who strove to "think the Trinity" in a way continuous with Augustinianism and yet effortlessly creative and original, is entirely overlooked by just the man who, as professional theologian, had been so ready to incorporate Hegel's epistemology and psychology generally. Here today though we should look for totality and unity, "that all may be one", not just *omnes*, as in the Gospel text, but *omnia*.

The Christian world has been split for centuries as between the so-called economic or salvific theories of the Trinity developed mainly by the Greek Fathers from the scriptural texts and the "immanent" Trinity, immanent as life essential to the godhead in itself, explored in Latin by Augustine, having Marius Victorinus as precedent and therewith a merely adjusted Neoplatonic worldview innocent of history. The differences of approach later crystallized into the *filioque* dispute which otherwise, St. Thomas insists, need have presented no problem to the Greeks.

The intellectual need thus to "thematize" the Trinity in terms of immanence should not give rise to a kind of second or different Trinity, offering a choice like that between corpuscular and wave theories of light, so that we cannot think both at once. In thematizing history itself the Hegelian dialectic at least softens the problem. "In the fullness of time God sent forth his Son" (St. Paul, *Letter to the Galatians*), a mission in deep identity with the eternal and necessary procession, with all that that implies for human life in relation to "spirit", its destiny and inner essence from the beginning.

But does this dialectic, attributed indeed, if in an unknown proto-mode, to absolute spirit itself, keep clear of some kind of vast pantheism? For philosophical thinking this is not of course to be excluded in advance, impatient as we may be of the misunderstanding. As regards any wish to soften the problem (of two Trinities), it would certainly be odd if the immanent Trinity thus reproduced itself in the history of salvation (missions) without any coalescing of these two frames. History, after all, is within divinely eternal knowledge, which thinks it and is never surprised by it. It is matter for regret, therefore, that the question (*quaestio*) on missions (*missiones*) is tacked on to the treatise on the Trinity in Aquinas's great *Summa* with all the appearance of an afterthought. History, even salvation history, and sapiential speculation were just not yet integrated in his time.

Before God comes into the world (as man), if he should, the world has its being in God, as St. Paul put it. The world is in God. This is a simple requirement of infinity, of which even Neoplatonism's emanative hierarchy showed itself forgetful. The point is made independently of Christian appeal to a revelation, though the latter is by no means to be excluded from philosophical consideration either, both in concept and as realised. How can there be a world beside God or other than God? Pantheism refuses even the question as impossible. Traditional defenders of creation, we may today call them creationists, simply assert that there has to be respect, alertness, for the *alterity* of created being.¹¹

In fact we can only begin to think such a world as we have if we first postulate that there can, indeed must, be otherness within the divinity itself. Rather, in seeing the world we see the necessity of (and not merely for) this. Of course human thinking can only pursue this line after first experiencing otherness in the human world, above all in human knowing, where the other as known becomes one (*intentionaliter*) with the knowing self. This just is experience, consciousness, viz. to "have the form of the other as other", to *have* it thus as one's own to the extent of being "informed" by it. The insight was never the exclusive property of a reductive idealism, which stressed only one side of things. Yet the self does indeed become, or is constitutionally on the way to becoming, the world, so that the world is his or her world. Aristotle saw this, before Hegel, seeing the soul as "in a sense all things", while just this

¹¹ E.g. Bruaire, *op. cit.* pp. 136-137.

ability to claim all finite being as one's specific environment and "prey" (as it was for *homo erectus* overrunning the globe though even Alexander shed tears when hearing of worlds he thought he could never conquer) was seen by Aquinas and others as *the* mark of spirit.

Yet anyone thinking thus must not close his mind artificially to the existence of theology and of revelation-claims, such as maybe he himself accepts and believes. They supply him with just the key his thought was searching for, perhaps. This will not though disqualify the possibility of his being able to ground this key philosophically, speculatively, thus vindicating the necessity it always had to claim (here we have the old programme of *credo ut intelligam* giving way by an inner necessity to *credo et intelligo*, or just *intelligo* or even, for Aquinas, *scio*). Christianity cannot but claim that the Trinity, God, is necessarily a trinity. Speculation henceforth had to leave an opening for just this necessity (even if Islam might seem still to wish to close it) and therefore quite naturally to attempt to show it as far as this may be possible, the project of Augustine and others.

With Hegel, however, Augustinianism might seem to be rejoining the Greek emphasis on salvation economy, we noted, as the Trinity, in his pages, comes to expression "in the fullness of time" exclusively, although only because the unfolding of time is our symbolic mode of perceiving the real and divine *series* we apprehend as the dialectic:

This was not a chance time... but determined in the essential, eternal counsel of God; that is, in the eternal reason, wisdom of God; it is the notion of the reality or fact itself, the divine notion, the notion of God Himself, which determines itself to enter on this development...¹²

The new factor here is idealism, specifically absolute idealism. Philosophy, in the Christian culture, has learned to define its task as thinking from the divine point of view or, which is the same, as transcending the natural attitude, thus ascending to truths otherwise hidden. This is a process first begun in pure religion and its associated contemplation. "My thoughts are not your thoughts." Of what kind then are those thoughts? Not to ask this would not be reverence but, rather, a simple lack of interest.

This is what makes philosophy a "specialised" science, viz. a taking of the divine or absolute point of view rather than an application of specific techniques and skills, at times overstressed. Thus to react against the latter by re-defining the perennial philosophy as "systematised common-sense" merely is to give away the main point, the mark of philosophy as absolute, universal, divine. Thus it first appeared among the Greeks and other peoples, and thus Porphyry characterised the Jews, from whom salvation is claimed to come, as a *nation* of philosophers.

If then one does not wish to divorce an immanent from an economic Trinity then time itself must be seen as an unfolding, a coming into view (for us) of the fullness of absolute spirit. This is what lay behind Herbert McCabe's objection to Raymond Brown's talk of a pre-existent Christ. Instead he affirmed an eternally existing Christ., beyond any before and after.¹³

In the Augustinian tradition, one feels, the divine life is still seen through Neoplatonic spectacles, in a way that is not integrated with what we can learn from the scriptures and what they record. Clearly, all the same, it brought a new dimension of understanding to the original, more purely exegetical Eastern tradition. History is not yet seriously seen as lying in God's controlling hand, human freedom being necessarily posterior to determinate divine knowledge and (*prae*)*motio physica*, as Aquinas explains (and as Augustine in principle understood as well), his insight being better preserved by the Calvinists and Hegel than by the

¹² Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, tr. E.B. Speirs and J. Burton Sanderson, London 1895, I, 85.

¹³ Herbert McCabe O.P., *God Matters*.

powerful Jesuits of early modern times. In fact it is his doctrine here which most closely anticipates the necessity of absolute idealism, as does Augustine's insight that "there is one closer to me than I am to myself." For when Hegel is accused of the "mad dream" of being God, as in an early paper of Rahner's, it would be more true to describe him as seeing the individual human substance as an illusion to be overcome. It is in *this* sense that consciousness is divine, total, of the all. It is God whom he makes so entirely sovereign, as infinite.

The contradiction, anyhow, between immanent and economic Trinity, remains unresolvable so long as both sides hold fast to a putative creation independent of God as having its own independent being, into the definition of which God does not enter though he causes it. He comes rather down to it from outside. Yet in fact the Trinity is disclosed in history because history is our symbolic perception of eternity which is God (and not a milieu or "duration" in which God finds himself).

We mentioned otherness, negation and the Trinity as positing otherness in God. The question, simply, is how would the infinite being come upon any idea of "creating" finite beings, negativity, being other than, if he had nothing like that in himself? There would have to be some kind of analogy, apart from the bare analogy of being itself, concerning which one must anyhow make the reservation that nothing is as God is, that any "other" entity is more unlike than like God, with respect to its being in particular. Being not, or being other than God, while still being something, must also have its divine counterpart, this is to say. Once given the infinite being there is no nothing *outside of it* out of which (*ex nihilo*) any other thing might come.

Some have wished to explain negation as arising with materiality and its extension, connecting this with Aquinas's (third) transcendental concept, *aliquid* or *aliud quid*.¹⁴ But what has to be explained then is why there should be such matter. The finite *qua* finite, Hegel finally states, is always contradictory (of its "idea", as he further clarifies – the scholastics were content merely to allow for the "imperfection" of matter, Hegel draws out the meaning of this, viz. That each thing is indeed both itself and another thing, or contradictory).

What can move infinity to produce finite being? We cannot simply appeal to generosity, for why does generosity take just this form, if *bonum est diffusivum*, not of just anything, but *sui*, of itself, and to whom is it being generous? The elephants cruelly killed by *homo erectus*? One thinks of Newman's reference to the impenetrable mystery of the brute creation. How is one generous, anyhow, to the as yet non-existent? There has to be a likeness here with infinity's own life, or super-life, since life is or has a defect, Hegel argues. It is only the first form of the Idea, becoming more perfect as knowledge (mediation) and ultimately as the Absolute Idea which is spirit. It is life itself which was for Newman incomprehensible mystery, though he should have seen that here the Idea as a process is first and immediately presented for understanding, though its reality falls short of it, the soul or form having the body, as it appears to us as not transcending life, for its reality, so that it is not freely self-conscious as spirit but with parts outside parts.¹⁵

Similarly spirit is in itself beyond being, in freedom, becoming being just inasmuch as it thinks being for us, in an idea ultimately identified with its essence. The divine being is already a contradiction. Hegel has plenty of precedent here.

In truth infinity has to include every possibility, an infinity of finite possibilities. Therefore we "live and move and have our being" in God. It, infinity, cannot be only a simple white light which fails to refract thus infinitely. In this sense creation is necessary, which does not however make it unfree. Infinity is pure, self-positing freedom and it is quite conceivable,

¹⁴ L. Elders, "Le premier principe de la vie intellectuelle", *Autour de Thomas d'Aquin*, Vol. I, Tabor, Paris 1987, esp. Pp.192-198

¹⁵ Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 216.

perhaps required, once again, that it only comes to itself in one and the same act as a *processio ad extra* of its creatures. It is this freedom which the fourteenth century nominalist theologians were first beginning to grasp. It is unfair to berate them for promoting atheism if what they were discovering were infinity's own options of negation. Atheism also, anyhow, has shown itself to be a moment in the dialectic, one perhaps of extreme apophatic Messianism, where the self-proclaimed "Antichrist" proclaims himself "the crucified" (Nietzsche), or where God dies, as at the beginning of our era.

Again, the creature cannot *be* in the same sense. Creatures are his immanent thoughts, since in his thought of them alone are they known, his thought which *is* them therefore. This is a straight consequence of Aquinas's denial of a divine knowledge of creatures in themselves, as he insists at Ia 85, 2 (of the *Summa*) that *we* know things in themselves. From this indeed necessary position it can only follow that things *are* not in themselves. It follows from this that any possible creation has to be derived from the very idea of the infinite. In the end we too who think it are ourselves each that infinite, in our idea, the notion, in unity of spirit.

But the having of ideas, this faculty, must be derivative upon one idea, one word, which it is of the essence of infinity to speak, speaking every finite thing too in that Word which is his self-alienation, reunited with him, however, in the joint spiration of the Holy Spirit or third person (*donum*). Here is the return upon itself, pattern for *reditus*, in the immanent Trinity, such as would not occur thus divorced from and transcending creatures if the Spirit were sent merely *through* the Son (true though this also is) out upon creatures. Yet it by this that they return to God, *in spiritu*, and so the Hegelian model tends to lessen the impression of two views as between *et* and *per*. The Spirit, that is, is sent out to consciousness already in deep identity with the Word, and so they breathe it back to the Father as he, the Word, does, life in the community truly participating in Trinitarian life. Hegel, with his three kingdoms, is heir to the Cappadocian fathers, to Maximus, to Eriugena and Cusanus, finally, via Eckhart, Böhme and even Leibniz.

The three kingdoms are of course in part suggested by the triplicity of the dogma, as is maybe the whole "triadicty" of Hegelian philosophical structure. It is not easy to find any treatment of the question as to why there are just three persons, in the absence of which one might wonder whether Hegel too has not been merely content to hang his thought upon the deliverance of canonised tradition, uncharacteristic though this would be. Arguing for otherness in God and postulating just two "processions", three relations, might seem two quite different things. Aquinas indeed makes clear that the plurality of assumed natures he allows possible could not entail a plurality of assuming divine persons, though here too one might wonder if he is not dependent upon the dogma as the dogma, in turn, was surely initially dependent (though one can allow for unspoken insights) upon the two missions recorded in Scripture as manifested just two thousand years ago, certainly long after the time of *homo erectus*, that is to say! Demonstration, if any, of the necessity of the Trinity might seem then still to rest upon the analogy with human intellect and will which, however, is a mere begging of the question, as Augustine would have been the first to admit, since nowhere did he set out to demonstrate this necessity which the Trinity must possess. Here we would have to focus upon the three "kingdoms" postulated by Hegel as exemplifying or embodying the *absolute* religion which, with de Lubac ("Christianity is not a religion; it is religion itself"), he sees Christianity as being. These three kingdoms correspond to pure thought (God reveals himself as Trinity, i.e. as positing of self, negation of self and return to self in his own eternal essence), phenomenal representation (the *same* threefold movement, but in the world, of incarnation, death and resurrection at a given historical point) and subjectivity as such (this movement as lived in the community, the Church, here and eternally).¹⁶ They are not, he

¹⁶ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* III, 3-6.

repeatedly insists, really distinct, and the third recapitulates the two first “kingdoms”, thus establishing their truth though it itself proceeds from them. Hegel identifies just these three “moments” or happenings, whether interior or “outward” (but there is no “outward”) indifferently, remarking that the distinction might seem to be made extreme by talk, Biblical or theological, of divine “persons” though this is overcome by the divine unity, denying tritheism, each moment presupposing the others (here he takes distance from the identification of divine liberty with arbitrariness of action which saturates religious discourse). The Trinity, as affirmation, negation and negation of negation is reconciliation in itself.

To know that God is three is to know that otherness is in God himself, and that it is overcome there. This truth is the absolute truth... It does not constitute a mystery... All the activity and content of philosophy consist in knowing that God is the Trinity. We saw it... in the System, particularly the Logic, where this notion of the absolute Idea, of the God One-and-Three, was elaborated without express reference to religion... [but] Philosophy is reflection of an experience. And Hegel knows very well that the notion of a Trinitarian God is born of the experience of Christianity. But for him this experience is not contingent. As with reflection, it is the work of Reason, the manifestation of spirit in history. Each philosophy, as each religion, comes in its time... Also, in his eyes, the affirmation of the Trinitarian God... stems directly from the philosophical order, and the task of showing the truth of it belongs to philosophy.¹⁷

We may wish to reserve judgement. Another Hegelian, McTaggart, concluded from the dialectic that absolute reality consisted solely of finite spirits, certainly more than three, who love one another and indeed, once the Hegelian identifications (albeit in difference) have been made the opposition between theism and atheism, again, can seem to have become decidedly muted. But this too is an ancient problem for Christian apologetics.

What one comes back to, unwillingly enough, is the question, identified by Heidegger as fundamental on any explanation, as to why there is something and not nothing. Appeal is made to the surprisingness of being. A dog, indeed, may seem quite unnecessary. Not so twice two is four, however, or that the whole is greater than its parts. These thoughts, and they are thought, are necessary anywhere and everywhere, and whether there is anything or not.¹⁸ It is true, maybe, that our concepts and thoughts are derived one and all from sense-experience, as it is true indeed that reason is present in sensation, as *quaedam ratio*. It is also true that our human way of presenting thoughts cannot be other than as *intentional*, that all thoughts are *of* something, of some being, no less. Indeed, the thought is itself a sort of re-enacted existence, *ens rationis*, to the extent even that every predication is an identification effected by the copula *est*, the meaning of which, as asserting truth, can never be fully separated from a predication of being. These truths, often ignored in the Fregean logic, are not overthrown by it.

But this proves nothing. It only shows that we humans see things and have to explain things in terms of being, taken from the existence of the phenomenal world. Existence is a species of

¹⁷ Van Riet, *op. cit.* P.81.

¹⁸ J.E. McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic*, 1896, ch. 2, insists that these very thoughts are something, are being, but he may well be at odds with the Hegelian theology here. Cf. *Encyclopaedia* 87, “this mere Being... is just nothing.” The medieval *ens rationis* or “as if” being is close to the Hegelian conception here. Being is the first postulate of thought, even thought of non-being.

which reality is the genus, McTaggart will point out. For being by itself is not phenomenal. Parmenides, said Hegel, and this was “the true starting-point of philosophy”, conceived the absolute as Being (and hence changeless). But in saying “Being alone is” (there is after all nothing beside it) thought seizes itself and makes itself an object for itself. There is no ultimate *thing* which is being which could be at stake here.¹⁹

We might specify, rightly maybe, with Aquinas, that our proper object is first and foremost material being, *ens mobile*, but that is a remark about us, about the subject, and it specifies a misperception if we find our idea of matter involves contradiction. It is in fact the absolute itself which is seen as, prior to philosophy, thought thinking itself. This is why philosophy, also thus characterised, is essentially an engagement in identification with the absolute. This characterisation, however, overcomes being altogether in favour of absolute reason. It is mere irrelevance to insist that we have to see this as something, some being. It does not, for example, prevent thought from asking with urgency why there is something rather than nothing. Being is an idea too, even if it is an idea of the ultimate act even of an idea. It is not self-evident for thought and cannot as such be removed from question. But the idea, as involving questioning itself, is necessary. To that extent nothing, nothingness, is an unrealizable idea, as Parmenides said.

As divine thoughts, ideas (there are ideas of us and these are what the Father knows in knowing us, so that is what we are: the mere habit of intentionality seduces us when we duplicate the “ideated” reality here), we do not compete with infinity. Analogy of being here is a logical doctrine only. In truth we *are not*, except “in” God. But to our plurality corresponds a plurality, a difference, in the divine unity, of procession and relations, although as regards procession *ad extra* (creation), God has no real relation to whatever thus proceeds. This clearly means that “*ad extra*” never meant what these words signify. They serve only to distinguish the refracted or “contracted” divine ideas from the real Trinitarian relations. The rational processes of our experience form our closest analogue of these relations.

So the Father (the absolute principle from which all fatherhood is named) knows eternally his Word, i.e. he speaks it, and his creatures, freely devised, in that Word. Therefore he is never without his creatures, eternally spoken (creation changes nothing in God). He is thus essentially Father to them also, as he would not be if they had been a mere afterthought.

But we are, as conscious, sons, not by an ordinance of scripture merely, but by the exigences of reason, itself the divine ordinance, each consciousness being the world and God, infinity, *capax Dei*. What I am capable of I require for my perfect being and will thus grow up to it. The identity is naively expressed by Boehme and others when they posit God as an abyss of freedom merely before creating. This contradictory position is overcome when it is seen that there is no such “before”.

Thus being, though posited, might still not be (as we say), even if necessary being is posited. This, Aquinas’s objection to the Ontological Argument, is also the proof of infinite freedom in God. But when a thought has been uttered it stands forever, and an eternal thought stands eternally. Nor could our own thought be uttered if it did not already thus stand. The ladder of sense-experience from which it rises to consciousness is thus kicked away.

On this ground our immortality is decided. Whether we live or die we are the Lord’s, say both Job and St. Paul, and certainly whether we live or die our thought stands, the thought of us, and it is in reason therefore that we have our reality, more abiding than granite. It is in the same way that God was called God not of the dead but of the living, and on this ground Abraham and Isaac live still. Thought is living and thought thinking itself generates everything (“life” is used analogously here) because, as we, being-bound as we are, must express it, thought is everything.

¹⁹ Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* (Logic) 87.