

GUIDE FOR PART I OF THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Prefatory Note:

On the first day of class, while reviewing the syllabus, I said that the first two weeks of the semester will be the most difficult. The reason for this is because we are trying to formulate the appropriate categories and language to describe a mystery that is so deep that it always seems to escape us: the mystery of how an infinite and free God, who needs nothing and is entirely self-sufficient can and does create finite creatures by giving them a share in his being and freedom; in other words, the mystery of creation. How do we understand the relationship between God, the Creator, who is the Source of all things, and creatures? This is a deep question --- one which Christianity has been thinking about since its inception, a question which receives its ultimate answer only in the Trinity. But before we arrive at that final answer, we have to understand certain fundamental concepts that *preserve* this mystery. Catholic theology has certain concepts in place that help to preserve the *difference* between God and creatures, in order to allow *God to be God*, rather than disfiguring God by confusing him with creatures or reading something creaturely into him. Thus, it is expected that you may feel that it is difficult to grasp; that’s okay. It’s a mystery that needs to be plumbed ever more deeply. As Augustine says at the beginning of his *Confessions*, “But in these words what have I said, my God, my life, my holy sweetness? What has anyone achieved in words when he speaks about you?” (Conf. I, iv, 4). And yet, we see Augustine writing thousands of pages about God! We are engaged in *faith seeking understanding*, and part of the process of diving into this journey is learning how to see this mystery through the eyes of the great saints, doctors, and thinkers of the Church.

I noticed that some of you found the assigned reading very difficult and the lecture to be a bit confusing or over your head. So, I’ve decided to do a few things: first, I am writing a summary of the class in this document so that you can go over it and try to get a better grasp of the concepts and mysteries described herein; second, I am changing some of the more sophisticated readings to ones that are a bit more straight-forward. In those cases where the readings are changed, I will maintain the currently listed reading as a “recommended” reading, but not as a required reading, so that any of you who are interested in diving deeper into these mysteries can still benefit from those readings. **Thus, in terms of the course readings for Part I of the course (which spans from now until Wednesday, 09/07), you no longer have to do the required readings listed on the syllabus. Instead, read this packet carefully and let this packet serve as your required readings.** You are still required to do the readings listed on the syllabus for Thursday, 09/08, in which we consider the atheistic position of Stephen Hawking’s *The Grand Design*, and offer a critique and response.

I want to make a few prefatory comments about this handout and the course. I will try to reference my sources in the tradition to the extent that time permits, because to do theology as a Catholic means to think in and through the tradition. There is no such thing as a *Catholic* theology which does not live in the tradition and issue forth from it. To offer a metaphor that was used in the early Church, and then in modernity by Henri de Lubac and finally by Balthasar, doing theology is something like being a conductor for an orchestra. Each of the figures in the tradition are a specific witness to God’s love in Christ; and each issues forth a unique “note” that gives us a specific experience of that love. And thus, the task of doing theology is to bring together a “symphony” of the various “notes” (figures in the tradition) that best fits the needs and tastes(!) of our audience, so that the choir of witnesses can be both impactful

and yet serve as a source for renewal. Of course, theologians can come to insights that can deepen our understanding of particular aspects of God’s infinite richness and the inexhaustible depths of God’s gift in Jesus Christ, but such a theologian must always do so in dialogue with the Christian tradition. As such, I want you to learn how to think with the tradition. The majority of the readings that I have assigned are of primary sources, so that you can learn and encounter the tradition for yourselves. In expositing the tradition, I will try to clearly identify the source of the terms that I use and how they fit together. I will also explain, when fitting, why I chose a particular figure to expound a particular aspect of theological anthropology. For example, why did I choose Thomas as a way to introduce the Creator/ creature, but chose Irenaeus and Augustine to introduce Original Sin? I will offer the rationale as we examine each of the topics.

I. Introduction

At the beginning of the course, I made two foundational claims—following Thomas Aquinas,¹ John Henry Newman,² G. K. Chesterton,³ and Hans Urs von Balthasar,⁴ to mention a few: we can only know *who* and *what* we are in light of *who* God is, and we can only know *who* God is on the basis of *what* God has done, that is, God’s *action*. God tells us who he is by showing us what he has done. We cannot know anything about God apart from God’s **revelation** of himself in his action of creating and saving.^{5,6,7} Thus, as I. A. Moehler says in his *Symbolism*: “We draw the knowledge of God from two sources: natural revelation and supernatural revelation.” Natural revelation refers to God revealing himself in the world around us and in human beings as the source and ground of being; supernatural revelation refers to when God, in his infinite goodness and freedom, shares his inner life with us and engages us in history.

¹ Thomas Aquinas: “From effects not proportionate to the cause no perfect knowledge of that cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God *from His effects*; though from them we cannot perfectly know God as He is in His essence” (ST I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3).

² John Henry Newman: “Christianity is a supernatural story, practically a stage play. It tells us who the Author is by telling us what he has done” (“Tamworth Reading Room” (1841), in *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (1872), p. 296).

³ Chesterton: “According to most philosophers, God in making the world enslaved it. According to Christianity, in making it, He set it free. God had written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which necessarily had been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it” (*Orthodoxy in Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol I (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 281-2).

⁴ Balthasar: “the unveiling of the ‘heart of God,’ which alone really shows us *who* he is, can only take place through the course of his history with mankind” (*Theo-Drama II*, p. 12).

⁵ St. Hilary: “God himself is our authority about God; otherwise he is not known” (*De Trinitate*, bk. 5, ch. 21 (PL 10:143)).

⁶ St. Irenaeus: “No one can have any knowledge of God unless God teaches them” (*Adversus Haereses*, bk. 4, ch. 6, n. 4 (PG 7:988)).

⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas puts it this way: “... For God makes a thing known to man in two ways: In one way, by pouring out an interior light, by which man knows; Ps. 42:3: *Send forth your light and your truth*. In another way by fashioning exterior signs of his wisdom, namely sensible creatures; Sirach 1:9: *He poured her out, that is, wisdom, upon all his works*. Therefore God made it known to them thus: either by pouring out his light interiorly, or by fashioning visible creation exteriorly, in which created things the mind of God can be read as in a book” (*In Epistol. Pauli ad Romanos*, ch. 1, lectio 6).

Comment [t1]: Someone may ask why I’m using the word “revelation” here if I am including both creation and positive, supernatural revelation? Sometimes Christians prefer to distinguish these two ways of coming to know God as simply “natural knowledge of God” as distinct from “positive, supernatural revelation.” But even people who frame it this way fully acknowledge that “natural knowledge of God” means “knowing God through his works,” i.e. through God’s action.

The reason why I prefer to use the term revelation to describe both, natural revelation and supernatural revelation, is because it expresses an important traditional idea that we cannot have power over God by snatching a knowledge of him on our own; rather, even the knowledge of God that we arrive at through creation and through our conscience and spirit is itself God’s self-manifestation. We see this in the tradition. Take, for example, to list a few:

1-St. Irenaeus: “When the word as reason is infused in the mind moves minds and reveals to them that there is one God, the Lord of all” (Adv. Haer., bk. 2, ch. 4, n. 5)

2-St. Maximus the Confessor: “the visible world, this unique masterpiece, in which God makes himself known by a silent revelation” (*Ambigua*, PG 91:1328a).

3-William of St. Thierry: “Since what is known of God has been manifested to man by God revealing it in nature” (*Letter to the Brethren of Mont-Dieu*, 114).

4-Peter Lombard: “The Apostle, in Rom. 1:19, says that God *revealed* (revelavit) to them...” (*Sentences*, Bk. I, dist. 3).

5-St. Thomas Aquinas’ commentary on Romans 1:19: “First, it shows what they knew about God; second, it shows from whom they received knowledge of this kind, for God *revealed* (revelavit) it to them; third, it shows in what way the invisible things of God [are known]” (*In Epistol. ad Romanos*, ch. 1, lectio 6).

6-St. Thomas Again: “What is known of God, that is, what is knowable about God through natural reason, has been manifested to them, that is, the Gentiles; for God *revealed* (revelavit) it, namely, through the light of reason and through the created things which he fashioned...” (*Compendium Theologiae*, bk. 3, ch. 8).

In both cases, we come to know God *only on God's initiative*, since the our very own “reason” and “self-consciousness” are themselves God's natural revelation to us insofar as they disclose something about their ultimate Source, i.e. God.⁸ Even in the case of supernatural revelation, divine revelation is not the communication of a set of theses, or bullet points, *about God*. It's not like divine revelation is God's CV (Curriculum Vitae) coming down from on high! In divine revelation, God offers himself, and in the very act of offering himself, he tells us who he is.⁹

Thus, my main points in the first class can be summarized in four bullet points:

- (1) We can only know *who* we are and *what* it means to be a human being in light of *who* God is and God's engagement with us. I summarized this claim by saying that “human beings are a question for which Jesus Christ is the only answer.”
- (2) This means that it is only in the context of our engagement with God, only in the context of God's self-gift—namely, the Father's surrender of his Son and the Son's handing over of himself *for us*, which we receive in the Holy Spirit and in the mediation of the Church—that we arrive at the answer of who we are and what it means to be a human being. Our life then becomes a life of self-realization in which we become *fully ourselves only in Christ*. --- Let me add to my comments on the first day that: this is because when God reveals himself to us, he not only gives us a share in his nature, but also imparts to us a share in his own uniqueness. We take on a new “name” in him—a name that will last forever—and which lifts us up into a direct relationship with God. God gives a person a name and then follows this with giving him a task among his

⁸ Let me be clear here. I am *not* saying that we cannot know God apart from supernatural revelation. Church teaching makes it very clear that God can be known through looking at creation and the conscience: “The same Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certitude by the natural light of human reason from created things; ‘fro the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made’ [Rom 1:20]” (DS 1785). What I am saying is that the knowledge of God can never be something that we can “grasp” in the sense of “conquer for ourselves.” We come to know of God through creation, but in doing so, we also realize that such a knowledge can never be divorced from the generosity of God in creating the world itself. The very fact that the world exists, the very fact that God created the world, is a gift. And thus, it's not like we can have any “power over God” by having a knowledge of him that isn't a gift. Our very reason, by which we know him, is itself a gift. Of course, it's a different kind of gift than supernatural revelation; but nonetheless a gift. Thomas Aquinas would put it like this: we can only know of God's existence through by looking at his *effects*, and thereby moving back towards their transcendent cause ST I, q. 2, a. 2. Thus, it's in God's free choosing to create that we can come to know him through his effects. But that's not all. Thomas goes further than this. Thomas says: “... Now since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect; as to ignite is the proper effect of fire. Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being” (ST I, q. 8, a. 1, co). And he continues later on in Part I of the *Summa*, speaking of how created intellect, which is thus sustained by God, is moved to act (i.e., moved to know God): “so the divine essence is united to the created intellect, as the object actually understood, making the intellect in act by and of itself” (ST I, q. 12, a. 2, ad 3). In other words, *even our act of knowledge in coming to know God* must be attributed to God's generosity! Of course, it's *our* act. So, my only point here is to explain what I mean when I say that knowing God through natural revelation or supernatural revelation always begins with God's generosity, with God's initiative. We can never pretend for a moment that we are the ground of our own being and that we stretch our hands upwards and can grab onto something of God, even a bit of knowledge, that we can hold over him. Creation is imbued with the generosity of its creator, and we come to see the depths of that generosity only in supernatural revelation when we encounter the Father's surrender of the Son *for us*.

⁹ St. Irenaeus: “He has brought total newness by bringing himself” (Adv. Haer. IV, 34, 1).

Comment [t2]: I explained in class how this approach is a dynamic rather than a static approach to theological anthropology. I explained that in Thomas Aquinas, for example, one finds this described through the terminology of different “status” (which is Latin for “states”):

- 1-State of integrity (status integrae naturae)
- 2-State of lapsed nature (status lapsae naturae)
- 3-State of reparation (status reparatae naturae)
- 4-State of glorification (status glorificatae naturae)

I explained that these “states” will be employed in the course to identify different *aspect or layers* of the human being, but that they cannot be identified with historical phases. Thus, for example, we cannot say that the state of integrity belong to Adam and Eve, the state of lapsed nature to Israel and the Gentiles, the state of reparation to us, and the state of glorification to us in the next life. While it is true that the state of reparation most clearly classifies our current situation, these states interpenetrate: the fall did not destroy the image of God in us (contrary to Protestant thought), and thus, there is something of the state of integrity that continues; and even after baptism, concupiscence is not washed away, and thus, something of the state of lapsed nature continues into the state of reparation. And when we become a member of the body of Christ, and thus participate in his Eucharistic body, are we not already sharing, in some way, of the state of glorification? --- The point is that these are not “existential” categories, reducible to historical periods or phases, but abstract categories that allow us to articulate the different aspect of our engagement with God.

human brothers. Thus, the giving of the name is connected to one’s vocation. (This will be discussed later in the course).¹⁰

- (3) Therefore, in this course, we will first learn about what God has done and then consider what light that sheds on what it means to be a human being. Reflection on what “God has done” (i.e., God’s action) is distinguished into God’s action in creation and God’s action in salvation. Correspondingly, we have to consider what it means to be a “human being in God” (i.e., in light of God’s action in creation) and what it means to be a “human being in Christ” (i.e., in light of God’s action in salvation).

Part I of the course focuses on understanding God’s action in creation. In Part I we ask three distinct but interrelated questions: (1) What is the relationship between Creator and creature? (2) “Who is this God who, without undergoing alteration, is able to create and send forth out of himself, beings possessing finite freedom? What is he like? Who and what is the bearer of this kind of finite freedom? Who and what is man, this baffling hybrid, originating from below, from matter, and from above, from God? How can such a being actually exist, behave and act as an integrated unity?”¹¹ (3) “And, finally, who and what is the Mediator who will recapitulate in himself the conflict between God’s ‘everything’ and man’s ‘something’ and, by so doing, sublate and abolish it?”¹²

I want to point a few things out about these three questions and about the approach we will take to answer them:

In the first question—the relationship between Creator and creature—we are asking about the relationship between Infinite Being and finite being. How do they relate? This is oftentimes referred to as the “ontological difference,” but a more precise reference would be the “analogy of being” (*analogia entis*, which we will treat in more detail later on), which basically states, in the words of Lateran Council IV (1215): “between the Creator and the creature so great a likeness cannot be noted without the necessity of noting a greater dissimilarity between them” (DS 432), which is summed up in a phrase beloved by St. Ignatius of Loyola: *Deus Semper Maior* (God is always greater). This provides the *foundation* for all that follows, because if we get this wrong, then we can never understand God’s incredible self-gift in Christ. To answer this question, I focused (and will focus) on Thomas Aquinas, who, within the Christian

¹⁰ Balthasar describes this beautifully: “The free self-communication of God (the essentially Unique and Incomparable) to man, if it actually comes about, has a second result: since the word which God addresses to man is always, in addition, the gift of a sharing in God’s nature, the individual who receives the word acquires a new quality: he becomes a *unique person*. ... The ‘person’ only shines forth in the individual where the absolute Unique God bestows an equally unique name on him (unique because it is chosen by God), a ‘new name which no one knows except him who receives it’ (Rev 2:17). The ‘new name’ (Is. 62:2), the ‘different name’ (Is. 65:15), the change of name (Gen 17:5; 32:28ff.; Is 60:14; 62:4; Hos 2:3; Jn 1:42): these all point to the fact that the man concerned, who was hitherto an individual species at the natural level, is now entering a ‘supernatural’ and direct relationship with God and so receives a personal call and corresponding endowment. ... Something of the radiance of God’s freedom and uniqueness falls on the essence and countenance of the chosen one, lifting him out of the purely natural species. It sets him apart for a face-to-face meeting with God; yet this does not transport him from the world but equips him to undertake a God-given task among his human brethren. Vocation, qualitatively speaking, always means being equipped for a task in the world; the substance of the task is part of God’s plan for the world” (*Theo-Drama II*, p. 403).

¹¹ This question comes from Balthasar, *Theo-Drama II*, p. 195, which was part of the assigned readings for 08/31.

¹² This question also comes from Balthasar, *Theo-Drama II*, p. 195 (same page).

tradition, had an experience of *Being* that is unique because of its depth.¹³ Thomas Aquinas is foundational for anyone who wants to understand the intellectual heritage of the Catholic faith on the question of the relationship between Creator and creature.

In the second question—the relationship between God’s *freedom* and our *freedom*—notice how now we shifted the conversation from God’s *Being* and our *being* to a question about freedom. The reason for asking the question about freedom is because the drama of salvation is not merely about Infinite Being and finite beings, considered only under the perspective of “being”; it is a *drama*, a *real* encounter between an infinitely *free* God and *free* creatures. Thus, what we find is that the God who is Being itself is also infinitely free, and it is in that infinite freedom that he can create finite creatures, and moreover, give those finite creatures a share in his own freedom. The moment we raise the question about *freedom*, all of a sudden the relationship between God and us looks slightly different than it did when we raised the question from the perspective of “being.” All of a sudden we are not just creatures who “participate” in God’s being, but creatures who, in the freedom that God has given us, can choose to turn towards God—the very One who gave us our freedom and our being—or we can turn towards ourselves, and thus, away from God. By asking the question about freedom, several things come onto the stage: now, we are not merely talking about “creation” conceived of as a “creature,” but of the infinite God who can (and, as it turns out, actually does) *engages* his creatures in a drama that reveals God’s own heart and calls us to share in God’s inner life. By considering freedom, we have now entered the territory where *sin* can (and, as it happened does) have a role. In traditional theology, this is called the “analogy of freedom” (*analogia libertatis*) as distinct from the “analogy of being.” What’s the difference between the analogy of being and the analogy of freedom? --- Well, let me put it to you this way. If the angles tremble in awe before God’s infinite Being, how much more do you think they will tremble before his Holiness? The analogy of being expresses the difference between an *infinite God* and a *finite creature*, but the analogy of freedom expresses the difference between an *infinitely Holy God* and a creature who has freely chosen sin and godlessness. The analogy of freedom presents us with a gap—a harrowing abyss—between the Holy God and the unholy human being; this gap could never have been described by the analogy of being alone. --- In treating God and creatures under the perspective of freedom, I assigned readings from Hans Urs von Balthasar because there is no thinker that surpasses his reflections and insights on how salvation history is a drama between the Infinitely Free God and finite creatures.

In the third question—the relationship of Christ to questions one and two—is a synthesis of all that came before. The Council of Chalcedon (451) describes Christ under the perspective being, and tells us that he is God and man, that is, Being itself and a being. The Council of Constantinople III (681) describes Christ under the perspective of freedom, and tells us that he has a divine will and a human will, that is, infinite freedom and finite freedom. Thus, we find in Christ the answer to two “ultimate” questions: the question of the meaning of existence and the question of the meaning of who we are. In him alone we find the answer to how God can simultaneously be ‘everything’ and human beings ‘something.’ --- For this question, I assigned a text from Balthasar that provides select translations of texts from Thomas Aquinas

¹³ For example, Balthasar says of Thomas Aquinas’s ontology (that is, his understanding of being): “His ontology ... remained without imitators—if this is understood in the sense of an elemental, historical experience of Being. Thomas’s experience of Being gathered within itself and embodied the inheritance of antiquity in its entirety, of an Aristotle who is always transformed and imbued with a religious light by Plato (with his historical backgrounds!), Dionysius and Augustine,” in *Glory of the Lord V*, p. 9-10.

Comment [t3]: Note: I am not saying that other figures shouldn’t be engaged. Of course they should! Catholics should take the approach described by Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Prol., where he says that just as the Israelites took with them the riches of the Egyptians when God led them from captivity, so Christians should take anything and everything in the world in the service of truth. Augustine said that God, in his wisdom, placed “ores of truth” throughout the world, which we should dig up and offer up to him who is “truth itself” (cf. Jn 14:6). We can learn plenty from figures, ranging from Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Heidegger, and many others; trust me, I get it. My own dissertation has a chapter on Schelling and another on Hegel, and I spent years reading Heidegger and Kant, etc. But they are not foundational for the Catholic intellectual tradition, or the Catholic understanding of God. *None* of them understand the God who is *Semper Maior*. We could never bow down and tremble before the God of any of these philosophers. It is we who need to critique them and to take whatever treasures we find, but only after “converting” them, so they can be pressed into the service of our Lord. Such is what Augustine did with Plotinus; such is what Pseudo-Dionysius did with Proclus; such is what Thomas Aquinas did with Averroes and Aristotle; such is what Karl Rahner did with Kant and Heidegger; such is what Balthasar did with Goethe, Schelling, and Hegel. John Henry Newman, in his *Development of Christian Doctrine*, said that one of the distinct traits of catholicity is its power of assimilation.

Comment [t4]: Some would refer to this distinction as the “moral gap” vs the “ontological gap.” I prefer analogy of freedom vs analogy of being because simply stating “gap” does not guarantee that we do not understand the full and infinite magnitude of the difference involved. But another reason is that the “analogy of being” is given expression in a Council of the Church (Lateran IV, see DS 432).

and Bonaventure that are not available in English.¹⁴ I chose Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure because they answer this third question by claiming that only a Trinitarian God can create, and provide explanations that are both beautiful and convincing.

The First Question: What is the relationship between Creator and creature?¹⁵

In class #2 (08/31), my goal was to treat the first question: “What is the relationship between Creator and creature?” in a Thomistic register. Herein I will try to expound how Thomas understands this relationship, and I will also try to provide references to Thomas with select quotes (so you can read the primary material for yourself!), along with definitions of his key terms. I will also distinguish when I am using a specific interpreter of Thomas (such as Maritain, Gilson, etc.) to explain a particular point, so you can get a feel for Thomas, on the one hand, and contemporary ways of explaining Thomas’ insights, on the other. This class proceeded in four broad steps: (1) pastoral relevance; (2) how do we define the problem; (3) gestures towards a response in Thomas Aquinas; and (4) implications of this response. I will follow the same order here, but expound each section with more clarity.

I. Pastoral Relevance

Why is it important to know the difference between Creator and creature today? How is this related to your pastoral vocation? In class, I referenced Christian Smith’s incredible work in the religious sociology of young people in the U.S. today. In one of his famous articles, *On “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” as U.S. Teenagers’ Actual, Tacit, De Facto Religious Faith*, he summarizes the fruit of his nationwide surveys on how young people understand God under the name “Moral Therapeutic Deism.” Basically, the survey showed that young people hold to the following “creed,” comprised of “five articles of faith,” as it were:¹⁶

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, Thomas’ *Scriptum* has not been translated into English; only selections are available here and there. I started translating this 10-volume work in 2011, but other priorities got in the way. And Bonaventure’s *Scriptum* has received a partial translation that came out last year by Franciscan University Press. But it only covers half of volume 1 of his *Scriptum*, and thus the translation doesn’t cover the portion that’s related to the question at hand.

¹⁵ Basically, this is a handout on the *analogia entis* (the “analogy of being”).

¹⁶ Incidentally, this creed, as it turns out, is very similar to how H. Richard Niebuhr, a professor at Yale’s Divinity School for nearly 30 years describes Liberal Protestantism: “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

In the article, Smith says that his term—Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, which he intends to describe this “creed”—is about “belief in a particular kind of God, one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in our affairs—especially affairs in which we would prefer not to have God involved. Most of the time, the God of this faith keeps a safe distance. He is often described by teens as ‘watching over everything above’ and ‘the creator of everything is just up there now controlling everything’” (p. 49).

At this point, a comment from the assigned reading in Balthasar became fully understandable:

“Is it not a fact that the majority of people continue to entertain an understanding of God that is anthropomorphic and close to mythology, where God is one among many; where God is in one place and the world in another; where God is in heaven and man is on earth; where God is one existing thing among other existing things, even if he is elevated to the level of the ‘*ens perfectissimum*’ [=most perfect being]”? ... This ‘popular,’ philosophically unrefined view of God is actually current in many places, as is shown by modern atheism. For when the latter [that is, atheism] protests against God—whether in the name of science or of the world or of human freedom—it becomes clear ‘that every form of rejection of God is directed against a specific, distorted and grotesque notion of God,’ but also that in this process the last two centuries (roughly) have seen a gradual dissolution of the ‘common understanding’^{17,18}

(2) how do we define the problem; (3) gestures towards a response in Thomas Aquinas; and (4) implications of this response. I will follow the same order here, but expound each section with more clarity.

II. How do we define the problem?

Why is this ‘popular’ philosophy a problem for Christian pastors? Because it presents a false picture of God and of the human being which serves as a stumbling block for people to encounter the living God of Jesus Christ. This popular view believes that the more we accredit to God, the more that is taken away from us. I think that Bishop Robert Barron captures the problem in a great way. Here’s a transcript from one of his lectures:¹⁹

Irenaeus writes one of the most important books of theology called *Adversus Haereses*, “Against Heresies.” Here’s Irenaeus’s great idea.—God doesn’t need us. That’s a very liberating idea. God doesn’t need us. God is God. Perfect. Absolute. God needs nothing. ... *That means that the world, including ourselves, has been loved into being.* See, because to love means to will the good of the other *as other*. Love is not a feeling. It can be accompanied by feeling, but love is an act of the will. To love means: I want your good not mine. I really want *your* good. Well, can you see how the God who doesn’t need anything outside of himself can only relate in a loving way to the world? ... See, the God

Comment [t5]: The ‘common understanding’ refers to when Christianity was part of the fabric of society in such a way that people were already primed, as it were, culturally, for engagement with God.

¹⁷ In the quotes within the quote, Balthasar is quoting E. Coreth, *Grundfragen der Hermeneutik* (Herder, 1969), 202.

¹⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama II*, 192.

¹⁹ Bishop Robert Barron, “Pope Francis and the New Evangelization,” Lumen Christi Institute, at the University Club of Chicago (May 8, 2014); accessible at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh6LiYbIZ3I>. The transcript corresponds to the following time frame in the video: 30:01-35:30.

who needs the world; —look at the Greek and Roman gods, by the way, who have tremendous needs: worship *me*, honor *me*. They end up doing tremendous damage to human beings, but the God who doesn’t need the world can only love the world. That’s the Bible’s story, that’s the biblical story. Now, I’ll give you an image for it. Think again of the Greek and Roman stories. When the gods come into human affairs, what does it look like? It looks like disaster, an incineration. When the gods come crashing into human affairs people die, they’re burnt, they’re destroyed. You see why? *Because those gods are in competition with us*. Those gods who need us in some way are in competition with us. Now, now, look at the Bible. Exodus 3:14, Moses sees this bush that’s on fire but not consumed. *There* is the biblical vision. When the true God comes close to us, what happens? We are set on fire but we are not consumed. We are rendered radiant and beautiful, and more alive and we are not crushed, not put down, not incinerated. The burning bush, that’s the great image of the true God.

Now, I want to stress this because ... every day in my evangelical work I come across this. The new atheists, so Hitchens and Dawkins and Sam Harris and Daniel Dennett, and all their disciples, are reviving the views of the old atheists. I mean... Feuerbach and Marx and Sartre and company. They’re just doing it in a more mean-spirited, more superficial way. But they are bringing forward the old arguments. What did Feuerbach, Marx, and company say? They said versions of: to affirm God is to deny humanity. Feuerbach, the father of modern atheism said “the No to God is the Yes to Man.” That’s the motto of the old atheism, it’s “in saying no to God I am affirming the human project.” Or think of Freud, “only when I get rid of this childish fantasy can I finally grow up psychologically.” Look at Marx, “only when I shuffle off this archaic religion can I come to real economic and political maturity. Hitchens, Dawkins, Sam Harris repeat the same arguments. I think what’s remarkable is that we Christians have been very bad at countering this. Because the biblical view of God is completely repugnant to the atheist assumption.

St. Irenaeus said, “*Gloria Dei homo vivens*”²⁰—that means “*the Glory of God is a human being fully alive*.” That’s Christianity. In fact I subscribe with the view ... I think it was Balthasar that said it ... If you lost all Christian literature in some great cataclysm but you kept that one line from Irenaeus, you’d keep the whole thing. *Gloria Dei homo vivens*. The Glory of God is that we’re alive. God’s not in competition with the human project. Look at our faith as an incarnational faith. God becomes human—again, the Church Fathers said—so that humans might become God. There’s Christianity. God became one of us that we might become sharers in his life. That is not the Marx, Feuerbach, Sartre, Hitchens, Dawkins view. **We need to come forward clearly with ardor and articulate this deeply liberating view of God.**

Let’s analyze Fr. Barron’s lecture in a bit more detail, in light of the assigned reading in Balthasar. Here, we can see a few things emerge clearly:

²⁰ Fr. Barron slightly switched the word order in the original quote, making the Latin reflect the English word order. The original quote is: “*Gloria enim vivens homo*,” which means the exact same thing, and can be found in *Against Heresies*, Bk IV, ch. 20, no. 7.

Comment [t6]: Just after this, Fr. Barron said that a lot of young people come to him and ask him about how to evangelize in the new media, and said that he tells them, “I say no, no, no, you do the old media first. I mean, books. I want you reading Augustine, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Newman, John Paul II, and everyone else.” (Video time: 35:30-36:40). This is something to keep in mind.

- (1) The problem is that they see God and us on the *same plane*. God is “higher” or “greater” and we are “lower” or “less,” but nonetheless, we are on the same plane in the sense that God and I are both *beings*, except that God is a greater and bigger being. This is a problem because for Christianity, God and the world are *not on the same plane*. (We’ll explain this more below).
- (2) Balthasar points us in the direction of a profound insight in trying to further diagnose this problem. He says that there is nothing new about the way that young people describe God; in fact, today we see a similar position as was prevalent in pre-Christian antiquity: young people are torn between two positions: either they believe in a personal God which is not infinite; or they believe in an infinite God who is not personal.
 - a. Personal God who is not infinite: this is what was described by Moralistic-Therapeutic Deism.
 - b. Infinite God which is not personal: this is what we commonly see with young people who believe God to be a “force,” or “energy,” or “one with nature,” etc.
- (3) But they cannot comprehend a God who is both infinite and personal. This is a problem. Understanding God as a mythological figure that sits on high or as an impersonal force are paths well-trodden towards atheism and secularism. How can we conceive of a God who is both infinite and personal, and how can we conceive of our relation to him?²¹ For this, we need to dive into the riches of the tradition to learn how to think about God more deeply.

Comment [t7]: This idea was traditionally expressed by the difference between “primary causality” and “secondary causality.” But ever since the beginning of the modern period, culture has lost its sense for this distinction. For those of you who have studied Kant, we can see this in the way that he sees God’s “laws” as heteronomous to humans (that is, a law imposed “from the outside”) as opposed to autonomous (that is, a law imposed from one’s self). Why? Because Kant’s understanding of God came from Christian Wolff, who had been teaching God as the “greatest being” rather than the “ground of being,” i.e. “Being itself.” So, Kant saw God as an “outside threat,” as it were, a cosmic Someone, sitting “up there,” imposing laws from “up there,” from “outside of us.” Think about this. In the Catholic tradition, we claim that human conscience is the divine law inscribed in the human heart. The very ground of our existence is the One who reveals the law to us, and in following God’s law, we do not become less of ourselves, but more fully ourselves. [Here I’m using “law” in the broadest sense, so that it can include the natural law, the law of Moses, and the law of the Gospels in their respective dispensations].

III. Gestures towards a response in Thomas Aquinas

First, I want to make a few comments about how to read Thomas and the structure of the *Summa*, and then I will create a table in which I will provide a series of selections from Thomas in one column with an exposition in the other column. In this way, you can learn to read Thomas for yourself, but also be guided by some of my comments. In the comments, I will include some references to important interpretive decisions and/or passages that are hotly debated (e.g., Gilson, Maritain, Przywara, etc.).

The Format/ How to Read the Summa: Scholasticism received its impetus from Abelard’s *Sic et Non*,²² a book that contains 158 topics/questions, and compiles quotes by the Fathers of the Church that contradict each other, i.e. that would allow one to say Yes to that question and No at the same time. This gave rise to a movement that tried to “synthesize” the Patristic heritage, in order to more deeply understand the truth and meaning of the Christian faith. The *Summa* employs a popular method in Medieval Scholasticism called “quaestio-disputatio,” in which a teacher lists a question (*quaestio*), followed by a series of

²¹ Other ways of expressing these questions: Can someone who holds to the mythological or impersonal view of God really understand what we mean when we say that the very God who is Being itself, the Source of all that is, has emptied himself of his infinite fullness and become flesh as one of us? Or that God is the answer to our deepest yearnings, because the depths of our *being* yearn for fulfillment in the plenitude of Him who is the Source of our being? And how can we ever persuade someone to believe that Jesus Christ is the answer to their deepest questions about the meaning of all of existence and all of reality? How can you convince someone that Jesus is the answer to the deepest questions to ever flow forth from human hearts? How could we do that unless Jesus himself, somehow, himself comes forth out of the depths of Being, and reveals to us the very heart and meaning of Being itself?

²² I phrased it as “received its impetus from Abelard’s *Sic et Non*” because some scholars classify this text as the trigger that *starts* Scholasticism; but the problem is that then that leaves Anselm out of scholasticism. Others consider Anselm the founder of scholasticism, and thus consider Abelard’s work to have been an impetus in a movement already started.

objections (*praeterea*) typically reflecting challenges posed by students in class, then offer a sharp and short response, “But on the other hand...” (*sed contra*) followed by a response (“I respond that...”), called the “body” (*corpus*). After the body of the response, the teacher would respond to each of the objections (*ad primum dicendum*, or *secundum dicendum*, etc.). One thing to keep in mind is that *Summas* are an attempt at *recreating* in writing and thought a witness to divine revelation in its breadth and as it occurred. What this means is that the *structure* of any given *Summa* is incredibly important, since that expresses how they understand the *interrelationship among the mysteries*. With this in mind, let me give you a quick snap shot of the structure of Thomas’s *Summa*. I’ll also explain below what the referencing convention is for the *Summa*.

The Structure of Thomas’ Summa:

At the beginning of the *Summa* (I, q. 2, a. 1), Thomas writes: “Because the chief aim of sacred doctrine is to teach the knowledge of God, not only as He is in Himself, but also as He is the beginning of things and their last end, and especially of rational creatures, as is clear from what has been already said, therefore, in our endeavor to expound this science, we shall treat: (1) Of God; (2) Of the rational creature's advance towards God; (3) Of Christ, Who as man, is our way to God. In treating of God there will be a threefold division, for we shall consider: (1) Whatever concerns the Divine Essence; (2) Whatever concerns the distinctions of Persons; (3) Whatever concerns the procession of creatures from Him.”

What results is a *Summa* that has five parts:

Part I (*Prima Pars*), which treats of Sacred Doctrine, The One God, The Blessed Trinity, Creation, The Angels, The Six Days, Man, and The Government of Creatures.

Part I-II (*Prima Secundae Partis*), which treats of Man's Last End, Human Acts, Passions, Habits, Vice and Sin, Law, and Grace.

Part II-II (*Secunda Secundae Partis*), which treats of Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, Acts Which Pertain to Certain Men.

Part III (*Tertia Pars*), which treats of the Incarnation, the Life of Christ, the Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, and Penance. **Thomas had a mystical experience after which he was unable to continue writing. He left the *Summa* unfinished after this point.

Part III (*Supplementum Tertiae Partis*), which was written by some of Thomas’ followers based on his earlier works, and which treats Penance (continued), Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, Matrimony, the Resurrection, and it has Appendices.

[Within each part there are questions (which are basically “topics”), and within each question, there are articles (which are basically, sub-questions within any given topic). It is the articles that have the quaestio-disputatio structure that I described above. Thus, a reference like this: ST I, q. 2, a. 1, co. refers to *Summa Theologiae*, *Prima Pars*, question 2 (“the existence of God”), article 1 (“Whether the existence of God is self-evident?”), corpus of his response. The referencing

The Structure of the Summa

convention for the other parts of the question-disputatio are: pr. = prologue to the question; arg. = objections; s.c. = on the contrary; co. = I respond that; ad. = replies to objections].

Now, I want you to notice the basic idea behind the structure of the *Summa*: it is intended to emphasize (1) the centrality of God as the One from whom and towards whom all things journey; (2) thus, it begins with God, and then shows the creatures coming forth from God, followed by a detailed treatment of the human being and the virtues (which define the human being’s relationship to God as “the good”), followed by a treatment of Christ as *the only way by which we can return to God*. Thus Christ is the point at which the journey begins its ascent *back towards* God. And the last part would be the final result of our return to God, i.e. eschatology. ***Let’s draw a depiction together as I discuss this on the board.***

Thus, Thomas begins by describing God as *Being itself* and proceeds to show how God can freely create beings *in him* by offering them a share in his own being. For the purposes of clarifying the creator-creature relationship, I will pull extracts from the most important passages in part I of the *Summa* and place them below. I am skipping question 1 since it deals with *sacra doctrina*. It is a true gem, and I recommend that you read it, but I would be tempted to comment too much on it, and I think it’s very straight forward for you to understand on your own, so I’m exercising prudence! In order to see the flow, I will narrate what comes before and after each of the extracts so that you can see the general flow:

HIGHLIGHTS OF PART I OF THE SUMMA

Summa	Comments
<u>ST I, q. 2: The Existence of God</u> In ST I, q. 2, Thomas treats of God’s existence (<i>esse</i>). The three articles are: (1) whether the proposition ‘God exists’ is self-evident? (2) Whether it is demonstrable? (3) Whether God exists? In the first of these (whether the proposition ‘God exists’ is self-evident?), Thomas makes the following distinction and claim:	
<u>ST I, q. 2, a. 1: “Whether the proposition ‘God exists’ is self-evident?” From the corpus:</u> “I answer that, A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways: on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us; on the other, self-evident in itself, and to us. ... Therefore I say that this proposition, “God exists,” of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence as will be hereafter shown (Question [3], Article [4]). Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not	Why is this question important? Think about this. On the one hand, we claim that God is <i>Being itself</i>, that which is <i>most</i> real, and yet, there are people who can deny that he exists. How is that possible? How is it that people can’t deny that I exist, or that this or that rock exists, but they can deny the existence of the One who is most real and who most truly exists since he is existence himself? How is that the case? Thomas will tell us later, God <i>is</i> his own <i>existence</i> (ST I, q.3, a. 4), he is infinite <i>existence</i> (ST I, q. 7, a. 1). So, Thomas makes a distinction. He says that

self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature—namely, by effects.”	God is most self-evident <i>in himself</i> but not to us. Why? Later on, he will list several reasons, but the two most common are: (a) knowledge is always in proportion to the knower, and thus, since we are spirit and body, i.e. corporeal, we learn through the senses, and since God is not accessible <i>directly</i> through the senses, we can only know him <i>indirectly</i> through his work (“effects”), which <i>can</i> be known through our senses. (b) Thomas points to God’s utter greatness as for another reason why we can’t behold him directly. Our eyes are not equipped to hold God as God would behold himself; rather, we can only behold God as finite creatures, with corporeal (i.e., bodily) eyes. Later on Thomas will say that trying to look at God directly is kind of like a bat trying to behold the sun directly. It’ll go blind, it can’t behold such brightness.²³
<u>ST I, q. 2, a. 2: “Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists?”: from the s.c. and co.</u> <i>On the contrary</i>, The Apostle says: “The invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” (Rm. 1:20). But this would not be unless the existence of God could be demonstrated through the things that are made; for the first thing we must know of anything is whether it exists. <i>I answer that</i>, Demonstration can be made in two ways: One is through the cause, and is called “a priori,” and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration “a posteriori”; this is to argue from what is prior relatively only to us. When an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to the knowledge of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every	He basically outlines two ways by which we understand causality: - <i>a priori</i> refers to ways of knowing things on the basis of reason alone, independent of experience. This is when you <i>start</i> with the cause and move <i>to</i> the effect. - <i>a posteriori</i> refers to ways of knowing things on the basis of experience or after-the-fact, looking backwards. This is when you start with the effect, a given x, and say, in order for x to have happened, y must have caused it, with the presumption that y is greater than x in order to cause it. Thomas is basically saying that we can only know God based on his works (i.e., <i>what he has done</i>, which is <i>a posteriori</i>). His “effects” are known to us, since we know the world around us and we know ourselves, and that tells us something about God.

²³ Thomas takes this imagery from his teacher, *Albert the Great*, who emphasizes the harmony and congruity of faith and reason: “The bodily vision of some creatures, like the bat, is totally shattered by the light of the sun, but the vision of other creatures, like human beings, is capable to some extent of looking at the sun, but because it is weak it cannot do so without the eyes trembling; other creatures, like the golden eagle, have their vision so strengthened that they can see the sun in the round. In the same way the mental vision of people who are held down by earthly affections and bodily images is material and is totally rebuffed by the divine radiance, but if their vision draws away from these things into intellectual speculation then it becomes immaterial, but it is still trembling, because it looks upon the things of God from afar, as it were, with the principles of reason. But if it is strengthened by the light of faith it ceases to tremble” (This quote is from Albert’s lectures on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius: *CH 1.1 (B 14 p. 12b)*).

effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.	
<u>ST I, q. 2, a. 3 (“Whether God exists?”), s.c. and co:</u> <i>On the contrary</i>, It is said in the person of God: ‘I am Who am’ (Ex. 3:14). ... The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. <u>Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.</u>	In the next article, Thomas asks “whether God exists,” and offers his famous <i>five ways to prove God’s existence</i>. It would be too long to quote all five, so I only copied the one that I find most persuasive. His argument basically boils down to this: why is there something rather than nothing? Finite reality did not need to be; in fact, <i>as finite</i>, we don’t have our being from ourselves, but from another. That’s exactly what it means to be finite. And if that’s the case, there has to be someone who has his being in himself, someone who is not dependent on another for his very existence, as the source of those things which do not have their source in themselves. This is God, who is the ground of his own being. God has his “own necessity,” i.e. God cannot not exist. But God has no need for us to exist. We could have just as simply not existed. This touches upon the point made by Fr. Barron in the quote above.
<u>ST I, q. 3: “The Simplicity of God”</u>	
<u>ST I, q. 3, pr.</u> “When the existence of a thing has been ascertained there remains the further question of	So, basically, here is the difference between <i>essence</i> and <i>existence</i>. <i>Essence</i> refers to the “manner of existence,” how something exists.

the manner of its existence, in order that we may know its essence. Now, because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not. Therefore, we must consider: (1) How He is not; (2) How He is known by us; (3) How He is named.”	<i>Existence</i> refers to the <i>that</i> something exists, the very <i>act</i> of “to be.” So, think about yourself for a moment: you have a specific “manner of existence,” i.e. as a human, that’s your essence. You are a human being. But, a “manner of existence” is real only if it <i>exists</i>, and thus, you also have <i>existence</i>. Now, Thomas’ claim is that while we can know <i>that</i> God exists, we cannot know God’s “manner of existence” because that is beyond us. In order to know God’s “manner of existence,” we would have to be able to behold God in his entirety, and as finite beings, we can’t.
<u>ST I, q. 3, a. 1, sc.:</u> “Whether God is a body?” <i>On the contrary</i>, It is written in the Gospel of St. John (Jn. 4:24): “God is a spirit.” <i>I answer that</i>, It is absolutely true that God is not a body; etc.	Put this in there as a friendly reminder. =)
*** THE FAMOUS “REAL DISTINCTION” *** ST I, q. 3, a. 3-4 For many Thomists, this right here expresses the heart of reality, the very mystery of creation, in a nutshell. Let me preface this passage from the <i>Summa</i> with some quotes by important Thomists: Jacque Maritain (1882-1973): “in saying ‘Subsistent Being itself,’ namely that ‘in Him there is no real distinction between essence and existence [esse],’ the metaphysician designates, without seeing it, the sacred abyss which makes the angels tremble with love and awe” (Maritain, <i>Distinguish to Unite, or the Degrees of Knowledge</i>, tr. Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 230). The equation of God’s essence and God’s <i>Esse</i> (Existence or Act of Existing) is “like a formula in chemistry which would set off an immense explosion” (Fergus Kerr, O.P., <i>After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism</i> (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 73). The real distinction: The ‘real distinction’ means that in God, there is no difference between essence (what God is) and existence (God’s act of existing). God is God. This means that God is self-sufficient; that God is the fullness of Being, and that the Source for God’s existence and God’s mode of existence is in himself and does not come to him from another. Conversely, it also means that creatures, whose essence is not the same as their existence, live in that tension between essence and existence. It’s precisely that tension that makes them ‘becoming’ as opposed to being eternal; it’s that tension that makes them have their “ground” in another, and not in themselves. It’s that tension that makes them yearn for a fulfillment that is <i>beyond</i> themselves, and which can only be reached in God. In ST I, q. 3, a. 3, Thomas puts forth the first half of the real distinction, by saying that God is the same as his essence; in ST I, q. 3, a. 4, he puts forth the second half of the real distinction, by saying that God is the same as his existence.	
<u>ST I, q. 3, a. 3:</u> “Whether God is the same as His essence or nature?” <i>On the contrary</i>, It is said of God that He is life	Let’s break down Thomas’ argument a bit. I’ll explain any of the new terms that come up here.

itself, and not only that He is a living thing: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6). Now the relation between Godhead and God is the same as the relation between life and a living thing. Therefore God is His very Godhead. <i>I answer that</i>, God is the same as His essence or nature. To understand this, it must be noted that in things composed of matter and form, the nature or essence must differ from the “suppositum,”²⁴ because the essence or nature connotes only what is included in the definition of the species; as, humanity connotes all that is included in the definition of man, for it is by this that man is man, and it is this that humanity signifies, that, namely, whereby man is man. Now individual matter, with all the individualizing accidents, is not included in the definition of the species. For this particular flesh, these bones, this blackness or whiteness, etc., are not included in the definition of a man. Therefore this flesh, these bones, and the accidental qualities distinguishing this particular matter, are not included in humanity; and yet they are included in the thing which is man. Hence the thing which is a man has something more in it than has humanity. Consequently humanity and a man are not wholly identical; but humanity is taken to mean the formal part of a man, because the principles whereby a thing is defined are regarded as the formal constituent in regard to the individualizing matter. On the other hand, in things not composed of matter and form, in which individualization is not due to individual matter—that is to say, to “this” matter—the very forms being individualized of themselves—it is necessary the forms themselves should be subsisting “supposita.” Therefore “suppositum” and nature in them are identified. Since God then is not composed of matter and form, He must be His own Godhead, His own Life,	(1) What does it mean to say that God is the same as his essence? What is “essence”? To put it simply, essence refers to the “whatness”²⁵ of something. Basically, when you look at something, and you ask, <i>what</i> is that? You are asking about something’s essence. <i>That’s</i> a dog, or <i>that’s</i> a man, or <i>that’s</i> a book. But in asking “what” something is, you’re not really asking about what that thing is in its particularity, you’re asking about what makes it <i>that kind of thing</i>. If I wanted to know the particular, I would ask “who is that?” Oh, that’s Socrates (which refers to the “individual,” Latin: <i>individuum</i>, or the subject, <i>suppositum</i>). But insofar as you ask <i>what</i> something is, you’re asking about its essence. Now, what defines something’s essence? Typically, the Scholastics would ask what predicates you can remove from a subject before it ceases to share something in common with others of its kind. Let’s take “man” for example. Is “man” defined by say, “white hair”? No. Because there are plenty of men who don’t have white hair, etc. So you end up with a set of predicates like: “rational animal.” Ahah! That’s the essence of “man” because it can identify men. (2) But, the moment that the essence of man becomes actual in an existing, specific individual, now that person is not the same as his essence. I can say: Socrates is a man, but I can’t say man is Socrates. Socrates is <i>a</i> man, because he is an individual who shares in humanity, but so do a lot of other people. What Thomas says is that we never see “humanity” <i>existing</i> as such. We only ever see specific humans, each as distinct individuals, who <i>express</i> what it means to be human, but whatever “human” means is always beyond them. The source of our “whatness,” the source of what it means to be a human, comes from someone else; it is given to us. “Humanity,” the
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²⁴ NB: the word “suppositum” means “subject” who bears predicates, or the agent that underlies a nature, or a composite nature. So, in the last sentence of the ad 2, he is saying that there are things about you, for example, such as your hair or whatever that don’t define your very existence; they’re somewhat “accidental” (i.e., non-essential) to you. This shows that you are not identical with your “human nature,” but rather that there is human nature in you but also human nature beyond you (i.e., in others).

²⁵ Medieval thinkers used to refer to it as the *quidditas*, the “whatness” of something, as distinct from the *haecceity*, the “thisness” of something. It’s the difference between “man” (essence) and “this man” (haecceity, individual). In Aristotle, he explains it as the *ti ên einai* (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι) or “the what it was to be (a given thing),” referring to the particular properties that a particular substance shares with others of its kind. In Thomas’ *Commentary on Metaphysics, Book 7*, he says: “Regarding essence, it should first of all be borne in mind that it must be predicated of a thing essentially; for those things which are predicated of a thing accidentally do not belong to its essence” (Lesson 4; #1309).

and whatever else is thus predicated of Him. Reply to Objection 2: The effects of God do not imitate Him perfectly, but only as far as they are able; and the imitation is here defective, precisely because what is simple and one, can only be represented by divers things ...	essence of man, is <i>in</i> each human, but it is also always <i>beyond</i> each human. And as we live, we grow to become <i>more fully human</i>, to more fully <i>realize</i> our essence. (3) But is this the case for God? He answers no. God’s essence—<i>what</i> God is—is not given to God from outside of him, as by another. Whatever the source is for God’s “whatness,” for God’s mode of existing, it comes from God himself. He is the <i>only one</i> who is identical with his essence. For everything else, essence is always in and beyond us. We “share” in an essence that was “given to us by another.” But for God, in Thomas’ words, “God is the same as His essence or nature, ... [because] He must be His own Godhead, His own Life, and whatever else is thus predicated of Him.” We start to get a taste for the payoff this offers in reply to objection 2. Think about this. If God is the source of our essence—the essence that is in and beyond us—then each thing that exists <i>expresses</i> God in some way. Thomas says: “The effects of God do not imitate Him perfectly, but only as far as they are able.” Wow! Creation, which derives its <i>whatness</i> from God and, as we shall is, its <i>thatness</i> from him, expresses the beauty and power of its Creator. Created beings, as beings, “imitate” God, though imperfectly. And why do they imitate him imperfectly? Thomas says “the imitation is here defective, precisely because what is simple and one, can only be represented by divers things.” In other words, the glory and magnificence of God, which is concentrated in God’s infinite unity and oneness has been “watered down,” as it were, by shining through a sea of fragments, a litany of created beings, each with its little light shining, like a candle, saying: I did not create myself, but <i>what</i> I am, my very mode of being, was given to me by Another who infinitely transcends me.
ST I, q. 3, a. 4: Here is part 2 of the “real distinction”	
ST I, q. 3, a. 4: “Whether essence and existence are the same in God?” <i>On the contrary</i>, Hilary says (Trin. vii): “In God existence is not an accidental quality, but subsisting truth.” Therefore what subsists in God is His	In this article, we now have the claim that God is not only his own essence, but his own existence. Now notice: if God = essence = existence, then God cannot be <i>a being</i> among beings. This means that God is <i>absolutely</i> free in the most radical way

existence. <i>I answer that,</i> God is not only His own essence, as shown in the preceding article, but also His own existence. This may be shown in several ways. First, whatever a thing has besides its essence must be caused either by the constituent principles of that essence (like a property that necessarily accompanies the species—as the faculty of laughing is proper to a man—and is caused by the constituent principles of the species), or by some exterior agent—as heat is caused in water by fire. Therefore, if the existence of a thing differs from its essence, this existence must be caused either by some exterior agent or by its essential principles. Now it is impossible for a thing's existence to be caused by its essential constituent principles, for nothing can be the sufficient cause of its own existence, if its existence is caused. Therefore that thing, whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another. But this cannot be true of God; because we call God the first efficient cause. Therefore it is impossible that in God His existence should differ from His essence. Secondly, existence is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as existing. Therefore existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality. Therefore, since in God there is no potentiality, as shown above (Article [1]), it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence. Therefore His essence is His existence. Thirdly, because, just as that which has fire, but is not itself fire, is on fire by participation; so that which has existence but is not existence, is a being by participation. But God is His own essence, as shown above (Article [3]) if, therefore, He is not His own existence He will be not essential, but participated being. He will not therefore be the first being—which is absurd. Therefore God is His own existence, and not merely His own essence.	conceivable! God has no need of anything, since his essence (what he is) and his existence (that he is) are precisely himself. Let's break down Thomas' three arguments: (1) Like I said, for something to be real, it must have essence and existence. So, basically we have two choices: either your essence = existence, in which case you have being <i>from yourself</i>; or your essence $\neq$ existence, in which case you have your being <i>from another</i>. So, Thomas says, this cannot be true of God since God is the “first efficient cause,” i.e. the One who brought everything else into existence, without needing anything to have his own existence. Thus, his essence must be the same as his existence. (2) For Aquinas, matter is the principle of potentiality, whereas spirit is the principle of actuality. Thus, it is when a soul in-forms matter to become a specific individual, for example. Above, he argued that God is not composite (we skipped that reference here), meaning that God is “spirit,” God is not made up of matter and spirit. God is, therefore, “pure act.” This means that God is fully what He is, that God does not need to develop or grow <i>into</i> God, as if God needed something to be more fully himself. Rather, God is fully himself, and as such, he is “pure act,” which for Aquinas, is the same as saying that God is “perfect.” An agent is moved from potential to act only by the causality of something already in act. As such, if God was not “pure act,” God would need someone outside of God—some agent, greater than God—to cause him to grow more fully in his actuality. But that's absurd, since God is the source of all that is, and has no need of anything. Thus, he has the source of his own existence and essence in himself, since he is fully himself and has no need of anything or anyone to become fully God. God is God. (3) Things have being either by participation in being or by being Being itself. God does not participate in something outside of him, that's greater than him, but is the source of his own being.
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ST I q. 4: The Perfection of God	
<u>ST I, q. 4, a. 1: “Whether God is perfect?”</u> <i>On the contrary</i>, It is written: ‘Be you perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Mt. 5:48). <i>I answer that</i>, ... the first active principle must needs be most actual, and therefore most perfect; for a thing is perfect in proportion to its state of actuality, because we call that perfect which lacks nothing of the mode of its perfection. ... <i>Reply to objection 3</i>: Existence is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence existence is that which actuates all things, even their forms. Therefore it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received; but rather as the received to the receiver. <u>When therefore I speak of the existence of man, or horse, or anything else, existence is considered a formal principle, and as something received; and not as that which exists.</u>	Here, let me note a few things for you: (1) Thomas Aquinas sees “perfection” as meaning “most actual.” I (2) When he speaks of existence in relation to created objects, note what he said: he does <i>not</i> speak of them as “that which exists,” but as “something received.” We receive our existence from Another, that’s what it means to be a creature. It also means that our perfection—our growth into who we’re supposed to be—can only happen by growing in him who alone is most actual, and thus, most perfect.
<u>ST I, q. 4, a. 2: Whether the perfections of all things are in God?</u> <i>On the contrary</i>, Dionysius says (Div. Nom. v) that “God in His one existence prepossesses all things.” <i>I answer that</i>, All created perfections are in God. Hence He is spoken of as universally perfect, because He lacks not (says the Commentator, Metaph. v) any excellence which may be found in any genus. This may be seen from two considerations. First, because whatever perfection exists in an effect must be found in the effective cause: either in the same formality, if it is a univocal agent—as when man reproduces man; or in a more eminent degree, if it is an equivocal agent—thus in the sun is the likeness of whatever is generated by the sun’s power. Now it is plain that the effect pre-exists virtually in the efficient cause: and although to pre-exist in the potentiality of a material cause is to pre-exist in a more imperfect way, since matter as such is imperfect, and an agent as such is perfect; still to pre-exist virtually in the efficient cause is to pre-exist not in a more imperfect, but in a more perfect way. Since therefore God is the first effective cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God	BASED ON THE COMMENTARIES I PROVIDED ABOVE, TRY WRITING YOUR OWN COMMENTARY ON THESE PASSAGES

Comment [t8]: WORKSHEET

in a more eminent way. Dionysius implies the same line of argument by saying of God (Div. Nom. v): "It is not that He is this and not that, but that He is all, as the cause of all." Secondly, from what has been already proved, God is existence itself, of itself subsistent (Question [3], Article [4]). Consequently, He must contain within Himself the whole perfection of being. For it is clear that if some hot thing has not the whole perfection of heat, this is because heat is not participated in its full perfection; but if this heat were self-subsisting, nothing of the virtue of heat would be wanting to it. Since therefore God is subsisting being itself, nothing of the perfection of being can be wanting to Him. Now all created perfections are included in the perfection of being; for things are perfect, precisely so far as they have being after some fashion. It follows therefore that the perfection of no one thing is wanting to God. This line of argument, too, is implied by Dionysius (Div. Nom. v), when he says that, "God exists not in any single mode, but embraces all being within Himself, absolutely, without limitation, uniformly;" and afterwards he adds that, "He is the very existence to subsisting things." ... <i>Reply to Objection 3:</i> The same Dionysius says (Div. Nom. v) that, although existence is more perfect than life, and life than wisdom, if they are considered as distinguished in idea; nevertheless, a living thing is more perfect than what merely exists, because living things also exist and intelligent things both exist and live. Although therefore existence does not include life and wisdom, because that which participates in existence need not participate in every mode of existence; nevertheless God's existence includes in itself life and wisdom, because nothing of the perfection of being can be wanting to Him who is subsisting being itself.	
<u>ST I, q. 4, a. 3: Whether any creature can be like God?</u> Objection 1: It seems that no creature can be like God. For it is written (Ps. 85:8): "There is none among the gods like unto Thee, O Lord." But of all creatures the most excellent are those which are called participation gods. Therefore still less can other creatures be said to be like God.	AGAIN, TRY TO COMMENT ON THIS PASSAGE, BASED ON WHAT WAS COVERED ABOVE

Comment [t9]: WORKSHEET. I put the full article here so you can see what it looks like.

Objection 2: Further, likeness implies comparison. But there can be no comparison between things in a different "genus." Therefore neither can there be any likeness. Thus we do not say that sweetness is like whiteness. But no creature is in the same "genus" as God: since God is no "genus," as shown above (Question [3], Article [5]). Therefore no creature is like God. Objection 3: Further, we speak of those things as like which agree in form. But nothing can agree with God in form; for, save in God alone, essence and existence differ. Therefore no creature can be like to God. Objection 4: Further, among like things there is mutual likeness; for like is like to like. If therefore any creature is like God, God will be like some creature, which is against what is said by Isaias: "To whom have you likened God?" (Is. 40:18). <i>On the contrary</i>, It is written: "Let us make man to our image and likeness" (Gn. 1:26), and: "When He shall appear we shall be like to Him" (1 Jn. 3:2). <i>I answer that</i>, Since likeness is based upon agreement or communication in form, it varies according to the many modes of communication in form. Some things are said to be like, which communicate in the same form according to the same formality, and according to the same mode; and these are said to be not merely like, but equal in their likeness; as two things equally white are said to be alike in whiteness; and this is the most perfect likeness. In another way, we speak of things as alike which communicate in form according to the same formality, though not according to the same measure, but according to more or less, as something less white is said to be like another thing more white; and this is imperfect likeness. In a third way some things are said to be alike which communicate in the same form, but not according to the same formality; as we see in non-univocal agents. For since every agent reproduces itself so far as it is an agent, and everything acts according to the manner of its form, the effect must in some way resemble the form of the agent. If therefore the agent is contained in the same species as its effect, there will be a likeness in form between that which makes and that which is made, according to the same formality of the species; as man reproduces	
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man. If, however, the agent and its effect are not contained in the same species, there will be a likeness, but not according to the formality of the same species; as things generated by the sun's heat may be in some sort spoken of as like the sun, not as though they received the form of the sun in its specific likeness, but in its generic likeness. Therefore if there is an agent not contained in any "genus," its effect will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent's form according to the same specific or generic formality, but only according to some sort of analogy; as existence is common to all. In this way all created things, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being.

Reply to Objection 1: As Dionysius says (Div. Nom. ix), when Holy Writ declares that nothing is like God, it does not mean to deny all likeness to Him. For, "the same things can be like and unlike to God: like, according as they imitate Him, as far as He, Who is not perfectly imitable, can be imitated; unlike according as they fall short of their cause," not merely in intensity and remission, as that which is less white falls short of that which is more white; but because they are not in agreement, specifically or generically.

Reply to Objection 2: God is not related to creatures as though belonging to a different "genus," but as transcending every "genus," and as the principle of all "genera."

Reply to Objection 3: Likeness of creatures to God is not affirmed on account of agreement in form according to the formality of the same genus or species, but solely according to analogy, inasmuch as God is essential being, whereas other things are beings by participation.

Reply to Objection 4: Although it may be admitted that creatures are in some sort like God, it must nowise be admitted that God is like creatures; because, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. ix): "A mutual likeness may be found between things of the same order, but not between a cause and that which is caused." For, we say that a statue is like a man, but not conversely; so also a creature can be spoken of as in some sort like God; but not that God is like a creature.

SUMMARY OF THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE ANALOGY OF BEING:

- (1) *Analogia entis* (“analogy of being”): “Whatever likeness there is between God and the creature, there is always a greater dislikeness.”²⁶
- (2) God is “*ipse esse subsistens*” (Subsisting Being Itself). *What* God is and *that* God is, is not received by God from anyone else, but has its basis in God himself. God *IS* his existence, and God *IS* his essence. God is not defined or needy of anything outside of God. This also means that God is not part of the world, but its transcendent ground.
- (3) What’s the source of likeness between us and God? God gives creation a share in his Being by conceiving of what things should be (essence) and giving them a share in existence (existence). To the extent that things exist, they manifest God by the very act of existing. This is because God freely created them, but also because in giving them “being,” we see something that expresses God’s own being, albeit in an infinitely inferior way. It is for this reason that God can look at the work of his hands and see “that it was good” (cf. Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).
- (4) What’s the source of difference? That essence and existence are one in God (God is self-subsistent Being; God has the ground of his being in himself and has no need of anything/anyone else), whereas our ground is in God. Our essence is never equal to our existence (we are always growing *into* what we are, *and* the ground of our being is in another). they are in *tension* in us.
- (5) How are they in tension?
 - a. Our essence is always in-and-beyond our existence.
 - b. Our existence is not grounded in ourselves, but in another.
 - c. Thus, as we strive to grow in God, we become more of ourselves, since our essence is always beyond us, and as we gain more existence, we do not become other than we are, but more truly ourselves.
- (6) How can we summarize what the “analogy of being” means for the relationship between Creator and creature? ***God is in-and-beyond the world. God is “in” the world as its source and ground; but he is also “beyond” the world as God.***

²⁶ Remember Lateran IV: “... between the Creator and the creature so great a likeness cannot be noted without the necessity of noting a greater dissimilarity between them” (DS 432). This was also commonly expressed throughout the Middle Ages and the great Scholastics by the axiom: “there is no relationship [*proportion*] between infinitely remote entities.” This can be found in the commentaries on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* by Thomas Aquinas (Bk. 3, d1, q1, a 1, obj. 3), Bonaventure (Bk. 3, d 1, a 1, q 1, ad 4), and Scotus (Bk. 3, d 1, q 1, obj. 2).

IV. SOME QUOTES REFERRING TO THE “ANALOGY OF BEING”

St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, II, 28, 3.

“For thus it is fitting. He must always be the greater, above and beyond all. ... not only in this, but also in the future world, so that God may always remain the teacher, and that man as the disciple may learn from God. For the Apostle, too, says that when all else shall have vanished, these three alone will remain: faith, hope, and charity. For our faith in our Teacher will always remain unshaken, giving us the certainty that he alone is the true God, that we love him for ever, because he is the unique Father, and thus we may also hope to receive something more from God and to learn from him, because he is the Good One, possessing inexhaustible riches and a Kingdom without end.”

Hilary

“There is no comparison of the world to God” (*comparatio terrenorum ad Deum nulla est*) (*De Trin.* I, 19).

Augustine, *Confessions* III, 6, 11

God who is *interior intimo meo*, but at the same time *superior summo meo*, “more inward than my inmost” and “higher than my highest.”

C. S. Lewis

... The man who does not regard God as other than himself cannot be said to have religion at all. On the other hand, if I think God other than myself in the same way in which my fellow-men, and objects in general, are other than myself, I am beginning to make Him an idol. I am daring to treat His existence as somehow *parallel* to my own. But He is the ground of our being. He is always within us and over against us. Our reality is so much from His reality as He, moment by moment, projects into us. The deeper the level within ourselves from which our prayer, or any other act, wells up, the more it is His, but not at all the less ours. Rather, most ours when most His. (*Letters to Malcolm*, 1964 (Collins, 1977), 71).

Erich Przywara

“God-in-and-above-creation”

“The more specific ways in which God can be known can be very different: at one moment, one might ascend from the perfections of finite things to the infinite source of all perfections; at another moment one might catch a glimpse of the majesty of the immutable shining through the flitting back and forth of mutable things; at another moment one’s experience of other persons may give one a lively sense of the personality of God as the fulfillment of everything we intimate in personal greatness; or, at yet another moment, we might happen to perceive in the restless activity of creation the ‘active response and reposing activity’ of the Creator” (Erich Przywara, ‘Gotteserfahrung und Gottesbeweis,’ p. 10).

In other words, in such experiences we intimate something of the transcendent declared within the immanent, and therewith the basic “in-over” [*in-über*] or ‘in-and-beyond’ structure of the analogy of being. For while God is ‘in all things’ as the effective ground of things, apart from whom they would not be, He is always also ‘beyond all things’—‘sensible [*faßlich*] in His creatures, who are His image, yet incomprehensible in His inmost being” (ibid, p. 7).

“*Deus interior* and *Deus exterior*” “God in all and above all,” God more inward than we are to ourselves, and yet surmounting and transcending [all things] as infinite and incomprehensible” (*Ringel der Gegenwart. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1922-1927* (Augsburg: Benno Filser Verlag, 1929), vol. 2, p. 543.

Karl Rahner, *Word and Truth IX*

God is not a piece of the world, but its presupposition. He is not an objective piece of knowledge beside other objects, but the infinity that is always presented in advance to the movement of knowledge, and within which the latter pursues its courses which will always remain finite. God is not the concluding hypothesis that follows from the preliminary sketch of a perfected conception of the world, but the only thesis that is posited with every one of the hypotheses from which we build up our concept of the world.” (Karl Rahner, ‘Wissenschaft als Konfession?’ in *Wort und Wahrheit*, IX, November 1954, 811-813.

Hans Urs von Balthasar

“[In today’s culture] there is no awareness of the biblical paradox that God can be ‘everything’ (Sir 43:27) and yet man can be ‘something’; and that God can be absolutely free without robbing man of his genuine freedom; and that, in fact, God shows his almighty power particularly by imparting authentic selfhood to his creatures” (*Theo-Drama* 2, p. 192).

“A simple mental experiment will demonstrate this: if God is ‘everything,’ when we add the world to him we do not have any ‘more’: finite reality, even if it is free, cannot constitute an opposition to him, for the latter can only be conceived in connection with the existence of some limit. God is absolute unity, and thus he cannot be designated as ‘Other’ (or even as the ‘Wholly Other’) over against any finite thing; rather, we must agree with Nicholas Cusanus when he calls God the *Non-aliud*, the “Non-Other.” We, for our part, with our finite freedom, must indeed designate ourselves as the ‘others’ when we think of our relation to God; but we cannot draw the conclusion that we are the ‘others’ as far as far as God himself is concerned. The question we ought rather to ask is this: Since we owe everything (including our freedom) to the ‘everything’ that God’s freedom represents, can we be the ‘others’ when seen from God’s vantage point? Does he not recognize and affirm us *in him* and not outside him? These are unavoidable paradoxes, terrifying and enrapturing us, and the Christian must keep them in mind when he addresses God as ‘Thou,’ as Old and New Testaments commend him to do—albeit in the ‘fear of the Lord,’ which reminds him that God is greater (both remote and yet closer at hand) than man can ever appreciate” (*Theo-Drama* 2, p. 193).

“*analogia entis* means that the absolute, infinite God cannot be compared with the finite creature who is entirely dependent on him. The creature can find no external vantage point from which to compare itself with God; it can only look up to God in a relationship of total dependency” (*Theo-Drama* 3, p. 222).