

We can, in conclusion, derive from the foregoing a threefold task for education in Marian piety:

a) It is necessary to maintain the distinctiveness of Marian devotion precisely by keeping its practice constantly and strictly bound to Christology. In this way, both will be brought to their proper form.

b) Marian piety must not collapse into partial aspects of the Christian mystery, let alone reduce that mystery to partial aspects of itself. It must be open to the whole breadth of the mystery and become itself a means to this breadth.

c) Marian piety will always stand within the tension between theological rationality and believing affectivity. This is part of its essence, and its task is not to allow either to atrophy. Affectivity must not lead it to forget the sober measure of *ratio*, nor must the sobriety of a reasonable faith allow it to suffocate the heart, which often sees more than naked reason. It was not for nothing that the Fathers understood Mt 5:8 as the center of their theological epistemology: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The organ for seeing God is the purified heart. It may just be the task of Marian piety to awaken the heart and purify it in faith. If the misery of contemporary man is his increasing disintegration into *mere bios* and *mere rationality*, Marian piety could work against this "decomposition" and help man to rediscover unity in the center, from the heart.—*Translated by Adrian Walker.* □

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## Notes and Comments

### Creation as a Call to Holiness

Recent years have seen enormous growth in both the New Age and Green movements, and their deep penetration into the mainstream culture. The perceived "threat" of the New Age to Catholic belief and tradition was recently addressed, informally and with a degree of humor, in the joint document of the Pontifical Councils for Culture and for Interreligious Dialogue entitled *Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life*. As for the Green movement, the Pope has frequently emphasized ecological themes in his addresses and encyclicals. One way of understanding these linked phenomena is as a popular response to the loss of a sense of human connectedness to the cosmos. A period of Rationalism seems to have left us alienated from the rest of the natural world, and at the same time to have deprived us of a sense of "enchantment"—as though the world presented to us by modern science is too small to encompass our true aspirations. Modern Romantics therefore seek relatedness, community, and transcendence. They seek it, however, not in conventional religion but in the perceived alternatives to hubristic science and "institutional" religion.

From within the Catholic tradition, it is perfectly possible—and indeed increasingly urgent—to recover relatedness, community, and transcendence. This can be done without capitulating to the excesses of modern

Romanticism, for indeed the key to all three lies not in any alternative to Christian belief, but in the deeper understanding and implications of Incarnation and Trinity. What modern Catholicism terms the "universal call to holiness" is ultimately a call to unity with God in the life of the Blessed Trinity. That unity is achieved through man (humanity), but it ultimately unfolds and transforms the entire cosmos. It answers the need of the human heart for the supernatural, but at the same time it incorporates the community of natural creatures.

### Threefold Participation

St. Thomas Aquinas achieves a fine balance between the insights inherited from his Platonic and Aristotelian predecessors, but his philosophical synthesis is not dictated by allegiance to any Greek master. His Master is a Jew. In his mental struggles, we are told, Aquinas would rest his head against the tabernacle containing his eucharistic Lord. The story is symbolic of the essence of his method, a method that enabled Aquinas to achieve his profound insights into the act of existence and the revelation of God as the I AM of Exodus 3:13–15. For Thomas, God is that in which "essence" and "existence" coincide: God is the pure Act of existence, which is to say the fullness of existing, unlimited and eternal.<sup>1</sup> Un-

<sup>1</sup>Neoplatonists sometimes distinguish Being from Beyond-Being or "Non-Being." As supreme principle, it is the suprasensational divinity of the Neoplatonists that becomes the *actus essendi* of Thomas, the divine *esse*.

like everything else, God does not require to be *given* existence, to be moved from potentiality to act, before he can be said to "be." The distinction of essence from existence deepens the theory of participation which is the legacy of Plato to Christianity. I want to suggest here that it requires us to introduce a distinction within participation itself. In fact I distinguish three types or levels of participation in God.

However Platonistic or Aristotelian a Christian thinker may be, the Judeo-Christian revelation concerning divine creation prompted a refinement of the philosophical tradition inherited from the Greeks. Simple participation in an Idea—even an Idea contained within the Mind of God—is not enough to make a thing exist. According to Thomas, it can only make a thing "what" it is. In order for us to say *that* a thing is, it must also participate directly in *esse*, which is the very essence of God, the supreme act of existence.<sup>2</sup> This is why I am inclined to speak of a kind of double participation in Thomas, as distinct from the single participation implied by Plato. It is double participation that distinguishes actually existing things (stances) from their Forms. And it is this which enabled Thomas to explicate a Christian doctrine of creation, very different in appearance from any doctrine of natural emanation. Second

participation—participation in *esse*—is not "automagic." It therefore needs to be brought about by a personal intervention, a deliberate act. God is not merely the Source, but the Creator of the world.

This way of looking at reality as creation and therefore as sheer gift is admirably expressed by G. K. Chesterton. Take, for instance, this passage from his book *Chaucer*: "There is at the back of all our lives an abyss of light, more blinding and unfathomable than any abyss of darkness; and it is the abyss of actuality, of existence, of the fact that things truly are, and we ourselves are incredibly and sometimes almost incredulously real. It is the fundamental fact of being, as against not being; it is unthinkable, yet we cannot unthink it, though we may sometimes be unthinking about it; unthinking and especially unthanking."<sup>3</sup>

There is also a *third form* of participation, which is familiar to Christian theology, if not normally under this name. That is participation in God's eternal life through grace. For to participate in God through sheer existence as a creature, which I have called second or double participation, is not yet enough to ensure eternal life, which the Eastern Fathers term *theosis* and which St Thomas identifies with the direct vision of God in his essence. This "beatific" (or beatifying) vision which fulfills or perfects our nature requires a further Gift to be made—a

Gift which, as a matter of fact, can only be received by the holy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is not possible to receive the vision without first becoming pure.

This threefold participation bears the mark of the Trinity, for if second participation echoes in creation the procession of the Son from the Father, this third type of participation echoes the procession of the Holy Spirit as the loving unity of Father and Son. And this is entirely fitting, because it is only the grace of the Spirit that can make the creature one with God in the state of beatitude. It is reception of the Holy Spirit—the "Person-Gift" (to use an expression of John Paul II from his encyclical on the Holy Spirit)—that enables the blessed to transcend the relationship of creature to Creator and to be finally inserted within the trinitarian life of God.

For in the Trinity, too, there is giving and receiving. The three Persons are the same substance of divinity precisely because that substance is given away *in toto* by each Person to the other. The divine nature or essence—which in St. Thomas is identical with the Act of existing or *esse*—is eternally given in full, and externally received in full, by each of the three divine Persons. The Scholastics defined the divine Persons as "substantial relations." That turns out to be a rather abstract way of describing the fact that "God is love." For love means giving and receiving; this

is the deepest sense of what it really is to be "in relation," one to another.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Freedom in God*

If all this talk of giving is to be more than metaphor, there has to be a sense in which God is free—free to create, and free to redeem. If the world were simply to emanate from God by natural necessity, as a kind of overflow of the Good impelled by its nature to communicate itself to other, lesser realities, then God would not have the freedom to give: the world would, in a sense, have been torn from him.

Arthur Lovejoy has given the name "principle of plenitude" to the theory that God must create everything, or every type of thing, that can exist, in order to communicate his goodness to the maximum extent.<sup>5</sup> There must be no "gaps" in the created order. St. Thomas seems to accept the principle of plenitude when he argues (in SCG 1, 75–76) that in willing himself God wills all things that participate in his own goodness and beauty, and that he wills himself and them "by one act of will." For "in

<sup>4</sup>This matter is elucidated by Michael Schulz in the Summer 2002 and Margaret Turek in the Summer 1999 *Communio*.

<sup>5</sup>Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard University Press, 1936). The Great Chain is also a Great Circle, for the *excess* is followed by a *recess*, in which things are brought to their final end in the God who is also their source.

<sup>2</sup>Of course, *esse* is received according to the capacity of the substance, which is defined—and therefore limited—by its essence.

<sup>3</sup>G. K. Chesterton, *Chaucer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), 36.

willing himself God wills all that is in him. But all things in a certain manner pre-exist in him through their proper models.<sup>5</sup> But God does not will all these other things in a “necessary” way, he adds (SCG 1, 81), because their existence is not necessary to one who is already perfect: “For the divine goodness neither depends on the perfection of the universe nor is anything added to it from this perfection” (SCG 1, 86, 6). Nor, according to Thomas, does *everything* that might participate in God’s goodness actually exist, although his argument here—to the effect that the creation is not infinite—seems a bit weak (SCG 1, 81, 4).

Thomas also safeguards the freedom of God by making several important distinctions, not least between different conceptions of “freedom.” He argues that God cannot be said to act simply by “natural necessity” since he acts intelligently, by decision, according to his own wisdom, and therefore moves himself to act (SCG 2, 23–30). Similarly, of course, the Father is not “free” not to love the Son, or the Son not to love the Father. God is not free not to be God, not to be *love*. Love is the perfection of freedom, and freedom is the power to be fully oneself, not merely the power to choose between alternatives. In God freedom and necessity must coincide, for both represent a type of perfection.<sup>6</sup>

Another distinction Thomas makes is between necessity and *convenientia* (convenience or “fittingness”).<sup>7</sup> He writes of the human will that: “When it is inclined to something as absolutely necessary to the end, it is moved to it with a certain necessity; but when it tends to something only because of a certain befittingness, it tends to it without necessity. Hence, neither does the divine will tend to its effects in a necessary way” (SCG 1, 82, 8). According to Thomas, therefore, God creates whatever exists because it is *fitting*, not because it is *necessary* to him, not because he is *constrained* by something outside himself.

Thus St. Thomas does end up with a “principle of plenitude,” but in a modified form. Once again he has taken a Greek philosophical legacy and integrated it with his Christian worldview—reason and faith working together. It was not necessary but *fitting* that God should create all things as an image of divine Wisdom—and God will always do what is *fitting*. If we deny this, we are implying that his acts are merely arbitrary or whimsical (as the nominalists and voluntarists of Western Christendom did in fact suggest). No, things are beautiful, and they are created in order to reflect and

<sup>5</sup> Ignatius Press, 1998], 508).

<sup>6</sup> John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock have explored this notion in an interesting way in the third chapter of their book, *Truth in Aquinas* (Routledge, 2001).

participate in the beauty of God.

This line of thought may be extended in a trinitarian direction. For Christianity, the natural tendency of the Good to communicate itself is completely fulfilled in the Trinity itself without any need to go beyond the divine nature. Thomas does not spell this out, however. What he has in mind in his discussion of God’s freedom to create is that the end or goal of things is in God, whereas God’s end is not in them but in himself. In any case, the freedom of God becomes even more important when we are considering “third participation,” or participation in the inner life of God through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The grace that fulfils our nature *cannot be compelled*: it is truly a free gift, as free as the original act of creation.

#### *Creation in God*

Let us now reflect further on these two gifts, the gift of existence and the gift of participation in the divine life, in order to draw some conclusions concerning the relationship of the creation to God.

It is important to repeat that in creating all that is less than himself, God is also *giving* himself (whole and entire) to all that is less than God, just as he gives himself in generating the Son. For God’s “simplicity” is such that he cannot give himself in part. He gives his own Essence, completely, which is to say his *esse*. Of course, that which is less than himself will be able to receive only part of what he has to

give. However, it is still related by its *existence* to God in a way analogous to the way the divine Persons are related to each other—and specifically to the way the Son is related to the Father; that is, by reception of the gift of *esse*. To be created is therefore to be in a relationship with God akin to that of the Son with the Father.

It follows that to be created is to be made in the image of the Son. Even stones and stars, plants and animals, fungi and viruses are aspects and fragments of that image. They are fragmentary images of *esse*. Human animals possessing consciousness and will are a more complete representation. But it would be a mistake to think of all these images and parts of images as isolated one from another, even if we can to some extent enumerate them one by one. The *whole*, too, is an image: the cosmos is not merely an assembly of individuals but a unity that itself receives existence from God and reflects his beauty. The medieval thinkers described man as the *microcosmos* because of this reflection of the whole within the part. They gave to man the central place in creation not because their physics was wrong but because their metaphysics was strong. (Interestingly enough, the abolition of this metaphysics by modern science did not in fact “dethrone” man from the center of creation. However peripheral we may think ourselves physically, our impact on the world and our aspiration to control it knows no bounds.)

Yet this medieval cosmic anthro-

<sup>6</sup> In the fifth volume of *Theo-Drama* we find Balhast saying that God’s freedom “is *his own necessity*” (*Theo-Drama*, vol. 5: *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco:

ology is still insufficiently trinitarian. The likeness of God is not yet an accomplished fact in us: to be an image of the Son by virtue of our creation alone is not yet to be in the divine likeness.<sup>8</sup> Even the animals and stones can claim as much. Every created thing is made in the "image" of God, in the sense that it forms an *analogy*. But a true "likeness" is something more than analogy. To be in the likeness of God something must participate in the dynamic relationship of Son to Father and Father to Son in the Holy Spirit. The realization of this likeness to God, which is the final perfection of our nature, depends on the use we make of our freedom with the help of grace.

Thus we are not obliged but *called* to love as the Son loves the Father. We are called to give everything to him in praise and thanksgiving, as an offering in the Spirit. Only in this way can we become what we were intended to be.

Putting this again in terms of participation, it should be clear by now that the "third" participation I am talking about, which is participation in God's own inner life by the grace of the Holy Spirit, is not extrinsic but *intrinsic* to first and second

participation. It reveals their very point and purpose, the reason for their structure. Grace builds on nature, it does not supplant her. It supplies a fulfillment which, though unanticipated, makes perfect sense once it is revealed, for it corresponds to a desire that we hardly dared articulate.

*Our very creation is therefore a call to holiness.* The cosmos itself is not complete until the image of the Trinity is perfected in the world by the self-offering of creation to the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit, accomplished through man. The ultimate perfection of creation is achieved through Christ, microcosm and mediator, in whom alone, through the Church that is his extended Body, the universe as a whole is personalized. As Nicholas Berdyaev writes: "It is in the Church that the grass grows and the flowers blossom, for the Church is nothing less than the cosmos Christianized. Christ entered the cosmos, He was crucified and rose again within it, and thereby all things were made new. The whole cosmos follows His footsteps to crucifixion and to resurrection."<sup>9</sup>

#### Conclusion

If the cosmos and everything in it participates in the Ideas of God that define the multifarious nature of all things, it also participates (by virtue of

its existence) in God himself. But the cosmos is not yet divinized, for it is not personalized. Only as *personality* can its existence bear more than a distant resemblance to God's existence. Only as part of the God-Man can it begin to share God's own life, which is an exchange of love, of continual self-giving, between the divine Persons. Until it is subsumed into the love of God through being offered in the eternal sacrifice of the Son to the Father in the divine Liturgy, the cosmos can have only a shadowy existence. But within the Liturgy it is brought within the Trinity, where all of reality is eternally present in glory.

It is this unity with Christ to which everything in creation is called, because it was for this purpose that it was made in the beginning. Nature is shaped from within by this *telos*. The more diverse and varied are the productions of nature, the more seemingly distinct from human life and from each other, the more exotic and bizarre, the more nature reveals herself as fragmentary. But every incomplete fragment implies a whole. The modern discovery of ecological interdependence is itself only a pointer towards the mystical whole to which all creatures belong. This completeness has a center, which like all centers is smaller than the whole but encompasses and projects everything else. The center, which is Man in God, is insignificant in scale, but supplies a key by which the whole can be understood.

Pope John Paul II articulates this vision in *Dominum et Vivificantem* (n. 50): "The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into the unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is 'flesh': the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The 'first-born of all creation,' becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is 'flesh,' and in this reality with all 'flesh,' with the whole of creation."

This is surely what modern men and women are seeking in the Green movement, and in New Age religions. The world is not a thing, but a process. It is a community of creatures, open to a destiny that transcends them all. Each and every creature is an expression of the loving attention of God. Each reflects in a unique way some aspect of the infinity where each becomes eternal. Through participation in Christ, the creation dies, but it also rises, a new heaven and a new earth; and in that new earth there is a holy city which is also a garden, "coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." □

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<sup>8</sup>Nicholas Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935), 331-332.

<sup>9</sup>"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). The distinction between image and likeness, which Western writers often read as synonymous, is made much of in the Eastern and Orthodox tradition, and I am assimilating it to the distinction between second and third participation.