

TRINITY, CREATION, AND THE ORDER OF INTELLIGENCE IN THE MODERN ACADEMY

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“Holiness is intended to comprehend the order of
being in its entirety.”



The Second Vatican Council insists that “all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love,” and that this holiness fosters a more human life.¹ The present article outlines a proposal regarding the meaning of this call to “the perfection of love,” specifically in terms of the life of the mind and the modern academy.²

¹*Lumen Gentium*, 40.

²An earlier draft of this article was first presented to the Arkwood Foundation, established in 1994 for the purpose of studying the implications of the call to holiness for the order of intelligence. The Foundation is named after the Arkwood Farm in New Hampshire where the Foundation was first organized and where members continue to meet annually. The Foundation’s guiding presupposition is that the order of intelligence and the truth of things find their full and final integrity in their (intrinsic-analogical) imaging of and participation in the trinitarian love of God revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Arkwood proposes to develop and display this presupposition against the background of the history of higher education, with particular attention to the disciplinary methods and curricular “logic” of the modern Western academy, as these operate also in the whole range of modern cultural life—the arts, law, medicine, science, technology,

I. Theological Principles

1.1 God-centeredness and world-centeredness properly understood are not opposed; on the contrary, they mutually imply one another. “In the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love,”³ Jesus Christ reveals the fullest meaning of the human person: here is the organic relation between trinitarian theology and anthropology (creation) that John Paul II says is “perhaps the most basic teaching of the second Vatican Council.”⁴

1.2 Thus, on the one hand, the creature, in its character as *imago Dei*,⁵ is destined to participate “in the very life of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁶ The creature realizes its highest calling through its graced participation in the exchanges of love proper to the three divine persons.

At the same time, through its participation in the divine exchanges of love, the creature realizes its deepest integrity *as a creature*. The organic relation between the Trinity and the creature established in Jesus Christ, in other words, does not reduce creaturely “autonomy” but rather grants it a “new” and expanded meaning.⁷

1.3 This double—paradoxical—assertion has its archetype in Jesus Christ himself who, in the Incarnation, “assumes” rather

economics, and politics. Though this article served in its original form as a statement of guiding principles for Arkwood, the article represents my own view as one of the founders of the Foundation, and does not necessarily reflect in all details the views of all members of the Board.

³*Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁴*Dives in Misericordia*, 1.4.

⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [=CCC], 1701; cf. GS, 12; Col 1:15.

⁶DM, 7.4.

⁷Hence the root meaning of the “*iusta*” or “*legitima autonomia*” of GS, 36, 59: the “legitimate autonomy” affirmed at the Second Vatican Council finds its proper meaning in an analogy of being based on the descent of the Son of God into the world (hence “katalogical” analogy).

than “absorbs” worldly-human nature.⁸ The unity of Christ’s single divine hypostasis does not distort but on the contrary empowers the integral distinctness of his human nature *as human* (cf. Chalcedon). The Son of God’s incarnate union with the world, in a word, itself makes possible and deepens the continuing difference of the world as world.

This sense of union coincident with (ever-greater) difference has its ultimate grounding and meaning in the Incarnation’s revelation of the relations of love proper to the divine persons. Within the trinitarian life of God, (infinite) union generates (infinite) difference. Within God himself, in other words, the union of love differentiates (in terms of the gift of a divine Other), even as this differentiation itself both presupposes and “enriches” the union.

1.4 Thus the mutuality of God-centeredness and world-centeredness means that the world’s (destined) ever-greater union with God coincides with, even as it provides the anterior condition for, the world’s ever-deeper integrity as world. And this truth is understood to have its basis in the processions of love within God himself, which have been extended to and into the world through the incarnate mission of Jesus Christ.

1.5 Holiness, therefore, is first the perfect love of the Trinitarian God revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and embodied in the Eucharist.⁹ The Council’s universal call to holiness, inscribed in the creature’s character as *imago Dei*, is a call to share in this perfect love.

II. The “Sacramental-Symbolic” Character of the Cosmos

2.1 All of this can be put in terms of the liturgical or indeed eucharistic meaning and destiny of the cosmos. “The very notion

⁸Cf. GS, 22.

⁹Cf. 1 Jn 4:7–12: “love is from God”; “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son”

of worship implies a certain idea of man's relationship not only to God but also to the world."¹⁰

2.2 The key here is what may be called the "sacramental" or "symbolic" character of the world—of the human person and of space, time, matter, and motion. Worldly realities find their true meaning, precisely as worldly—or indeed "natural"—in their character simultaneously and intrinsically as epiphanies of God.¹¹

The "ontological sacramentality" indicated here can be summarized as follows:

We need water and oil, bread and wine in order to be in communion with God and to know Him. Yet conversely—and such is the teaching, if not of our modern theological manuals, at least of the liturgy itself—it is this communion with God by means of "matter" that reveals the true meaning of "matter," i.e., of the world itself. We can

¹⁰Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998 [1963]), 119. Cf. also *The Journals of Alexander Schmemmann 1973–1983*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000).

¹¹Schmemmann, in agreement with the argument of Henri de Lubac (for example, in *Corpus Mysticum*), points out how Christian theology, by virtue of a certain long-standing understanding of sacrament, and of the relation between the "natural" and the "supernatural," has itself contributed to the draining of the world of its structurally "symbolic" character (and this notwithstanding what is often an intense piety in other respects). He and de Lubac explain this in terms of an opposition between "real" and "mystical" in the understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist stemming from the controversies at the end of the twelfth century surrounding the work of Berengarius of Tours, and the response by the Lateran Council (see Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 128–129). The consequence of this opposition, affirmed from different sides by both Berengarius and the Council, was the collapse of the fundamental Christian *mysterion*, the paradoxical "'holding together' of the reality of the symbol and the symbolism of reality. It was the collapse of the fundamental Christian understanding of creation in terms of its ontological sacramentality" (129).

Since then, Christian thought has continued the tendency "to oppose these terms, to reject, implicitly or explicitly, the 'symbolic realism' and the 'realistic symbolism' of the Christian world view . . . [T]he world ceases to be the 'natural' sacrament of God, and the supernatural sacrament ceases to have any 'continuity' with the world" (129). "[B]y denying the world its natural 'sacramentality,' and radically opposing the 'natural' to the 'supernatural,' [this dualistic tendency] make[s] the world *grace-proof*, and ultimately lead[s] to *secularism*" (130).

only worship in time, yet it is worship that ultimately not only reveals the meaning of time, but truly “renews” time itself. There is no worship without the participation of the body, without words and silence, light and darkness, movement and stillness—yet it is in and through worship that all these essential expressions of man in his relation to the world are given their ultimate “term” of reference, revealed in their highest and deepest meaning (121).

Thus the term “sacramental” means that for the world to be means of worship and means of grace is not accidental, but the revelation of its meaning, the restoration of its essence, the fulfillment of its destiny. It is the “natural sacramentality” of the world that finds expression in worship and makes the latter the essential *ergon* of man, the foundation and the spring of his life and activities as man. Being the epiphany of God, worship is thus the epiphany of the world; being communion with God, it is the only true communion with the world; being knowledge of God, it is the ultimate fulfillment of all human knowledge (121).

In sum, the movement toward God in Christ (through the Church, by the Holy Spirit) is not something tacked on, as it were, to a space and time and matter originally constituted on their own and in abstraction from this movement. On the contrary, the movement toward God in Christ lies at the core of space and time and matter in their original constitution, and hence in their original meaning precisely *as* space and *as* time and *as* matter.¹²

2.3 It is important to see that the “continuity” of the Christian *leitourgia* with the whole of man’s “natural” worship and indeed with the “ontological *sacramentality*” of creation “includes

¹²Cf. Psalm 104; the Canticle of Daniel 3:52–90. Cf. Also Emile Mersch, *Morale et Corps Mystique*, 4th ed. (Brussels: Desclée de Brouwer, 1955): “Every being in itself and through its structure is a limitless submission. It is created; that is to say, its very existence, being a relation, is a dependence and a homage. The universe is only cult and religion But, it must be carefully noted, [the] ordinary sense [of religion] runs the risk of dwarfing the real meaning. Religion is not merely a human phenomenon; it is but the new and infinitely more elevated expression taken in us by a manner of being which is necessarily the manner of being of all things. So, the different aspects which it assumes in us are in continuity with the constitution of the universe” (28).

in itself an equally essential principle of *discontinuity*.”¹³ The orders of redemption (Church) and of creation (world, cosmos) remain essentially distinct; but the pertinent point is that the Church and the cosmos are nonetheless still brought into being *from their beginning with the same ontological end* (cf. Col 1: 15–18; *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 50). Hence, although the world, as distinct from the Church, is not (yet) a sacrament in the proper sense, it remains dynamically (finally) ordered, precisely in its original ontological creatureliness, (from and) toward sacrament in the proper sense—toward the Eucharist.

The “sacramental” or “symbolic” nature of the world-cosmos, then, presupposes this simultaneous—paradoxical—continuity within discontinuity of the Church-sacrament and the world.

2.4 The discontinuity between sacrament and world is intensified by the world’s rejection of its own destiny and fulfillment:

if the basis of all Christian worship is the Incarnation, its true content is always the Cross and the Resurrection. Through these events the new life in Christ, the Incarnate Lord, is “hid with Christ in God,” and made into a life “not of this world.” The world which rejected Christ must itself die in man if it is to become again means of communion, means of participation in the life which shone forth from the grave, in the Kingdom which is not “of this world,” and which in terms of this world is still to come.¹⁴

Hence, in sum,

[i]t is only because the Church’s *leitourgia* is always cosmic, i.e., assumes into Christ all creation, and is always historical, i.e., assumes into Christ all time, that it can therefore also be eschatological, i.e., make us true participants of the Kingdom to come.

Such then is the idea of man’s relation to the world implied in the very notion of worship. Worship is by definition and act a reality with cosmic, historical, and

¹³Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 122.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

eschatological dimensions, the expression thus not merely of “piety,” but of an all-embracing “world view.”¹⁵

III. Holiness and Intelligence

3.1 Here, then, is the distinctive claim advanced here: the integrated transformation of the creaturely subject implied by the call to holiness and the liturgical destiny of the world comprehends the dimensions of *order* and *intelligence*, via an intrinsic analogy taking its bearings from the trinitarian christocentrism indicated in *Gaudium et Spes* 22. Moreover, this creaturely subject includes not only the human person, but also, through the person and in an intrinsic-analogous way, the entire cosmos (Maximus the Confessor).

Hence the twofold presupposition that undergirds our proposal: holiness is a matter not only of (subjective) will but also of (objective) intelligence; and holiness is to be predicated not only of human beings but (via analogy) of all created beings.

In a word, holiness, with its call to share in the perfect love of the Father in the Son by the Spirit, is inclusive of the objective order of intelligence and of the meaning and truth of all created entities. Holiness is intended to comprehend the order of being in its entirety.

3.2 The grounds for the twofold presupposition here, again, are trinitarian and christological. In Jesus Christ, divine love is revealed to contain *logos*. And the Incarnation of God the Son in Jesus Christ “signifies the taking up into 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 . . . also has a cosmic dimension.”¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid., 123.

¹⁶*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 50. Cf. Also Gen 9:8–14: “God spoke to Noah and his sons, ‘See, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; also with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on earth. I establish my Covenant with you: no thing of flesh shall be swept away again by the waters of the flood . . . Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature for all generations . . . [.] a sign

IV. The Creaturely *Imago Dei*

4.1 The order of love proper to creaturely holiness is given in the creature's character as *imago Dei*.

That the person is made in the image of God in Jesus Christ means that he or she is intended from his or her creation to "image" all that is fundamental to the reality of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ The person, in Jesus Christ, is destined to share in the trinitarian communion of Father, Son, and Spirit, through Mary and the Church. Completely dependent upon Jesus Christ and subordinate to him, Mary with her archetypal *fiat* and *magnificat* that render her fruitful (*theotokos*), and the Church with her sacraments (e.g., Baptism, Confession [Penance and Reconciliation], and Eucharist), which effect what they signify, therefore provide the concrete "form" and path for realizing this destiny, and hence for all patterns of life and thought. These supernatural "forms" do not replace the creature's natural form but are rather intended to be, as it were, the "forms of this form."

4.2 The content of the *imago Dei* consists first in the person's capacity for God, and only consequently (ontologically) in the person's dominion over the rest of creation. The person's

of the Covenant between me and the earth'." Schmemmann indicates the centrality of nuptiality in understanding God's relation in Christ to the world—that is, in and through the Church (84)—and in turn the liturgical relation of the world to God. He suggests that, provided we understand the nuptial mystery in its properly theological terms (in terms of the relation between Christ and the Church), we can see that it bears "cosmic and universal dimensions," indeed, reveals itself "as the all-embracing mystery of being itself" (82). The cosmic dimension of the liturgical-nuptial love emphasized by Schmemmann is captured nicely by what Pope John Paul II terms the "nuptial attribute" of the (human) body. The notion of "nuptiality," or "nuptial body," entails that the space, time, matter, and motion ingredient in the body somehow themselves already, in their original structure as space, time, matter, and motion, bear an aptness for (sacramental-nuptial) love. (See John Paul II, "The Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis," in John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* [Boston: Pauline Books, 1997], 25–102, at 61.)

¹⁷"The vocation of humanity is to show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son" (CCC, 1877). Cf. CCC, 1701–1702.

imaging of God consists in becoming sons and daughters “in the Son, that [they] may cry out in the Spirit, Abba, Father.”¹⁸

The created person is from and for God in Jesus Christ, and is constitutively related to others in God. The person is thus structured intrinsically by a dynamic rhythm of receiving and giving, first in relation to God and then (ontologically, not merely successively) in relation to others. This does not imply a denial that the person has a (self-)identity; it implies only that that (self-)identity is not exclusive but always already inclusive of dynamic relation (to God and to others).¹⁹ The creature’s giving of self always presupposes a simultaneous-anterior receiving of self (and others) from God.

4.3 It is crucial to understand that the gifted character of the creature indicates a twofold gratuity on God’s part: the (“natural”) gratuity of God’s gift to the creature of its nature as such, and the (“supernatural”) gratuity of God’s invitation to the creature to share in God’s divine life that is coincident with the beginning of the creature’s existence.

4.4 As already noted, the Incarnation’s intrinsic cosmic dimension implies that, in an analogical sense, the entire created cosmos shares in the nature and destined holiness of the human person. Not just humans but all created beings are ordered from, toward, and in the love revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. All of cosmic being shares *analogously*—that is, in ways that are coincident with (ever-greater) difference—in the double giftedness that is constitutive of the creature as such.

Mindful of analogy, it is therefore true to say that love constitutes the primitive order of every created being: the orders of being and love are convertible.

4.5 The convertibility of being and love, based on a Trinity- and Christ-centered analogy, indicates a primacy of beauty or glory. Beauty, as the splendor of the order that is love, thereby signifies (and effects) the integration of being and love required by the notion of creation (as gift from God). The relations proper to

¹⁸GS, 22.

¹⁹Cf. CCC, 1702; GS, 12: *communio personarum*.

the creature that consist in receiving and giving presuppose the primacy, and inherent attractiveness termed beauty, of the O(o)ther as O(o)ther. These relations, with their primacy of beauty, find their paradigmatic creaturely expression in the mother's smile.²⁰

4.6 The organic relation of trinitarian christology and creation, in sum, indicates an analogy of being and truth and goodness anchored in an analogy of love (and drama) and beauty.

In the words of John Paul II, the *opus gloriae* (the work of glorifying God) is "the fundamental destiny of every creature. . . ."²¹ In the freedom of the human person, this destiny becomes properly dramatic.

4.7 The creaturely *imago Dei* has been disfigured by the sin of Adam.²² Affirmation of the goodness of creation, consequently, coincides with a dynamic for transforming creation. This is the way of God's own engagement with the cosmos, as reflected in the "logic" of the Incarnation, whose creative love moves always toward the redemptive love of the Cross.

The paradox indicated here gives rise to an ever-present tension: on the one hand, there is no truth, goodness, or beauty in the cosmos, from whatever source, that is not first to be affirmed and embraced (cf. Col 1:15–18); on the other hand, there is no truth, goodness, or beauty in the cosmos that does not need simultaneously to be "elevated" and "reoriented" in terms of the *opus gloriae*.

Otherwise put: every creature, though inherently true, good, and beautiful by virtue of its creation, stands in need of liberation ("exodus") from the slavery of sin, and thus in need of the suffering transformation brought about by the Cross and sacramentally by Baptism, Confession, and the Eucharist. This holds true properly for humanity, where liberation becomes dramatic, but, in and through humanity's "work," it holds true as well for the entire created cosmos (Maximus the Confessor).

²⁰See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol. 5: *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* Trans. Oliver Davis et. al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

²¹Crossing the Threshold of Hope (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994), 18.

²²GS, 22; cf. CCC, 1701

4.8 The sin of the world, which is properly personal (hence subjective), also has a distinctly “objective” (or “external”) dimension.²³ This “objective” dimension lies at the core of what Pope John Paul II has identified as the “structural sin”²⁴ requiring “an authentic theology of integral human liberation.”²⁵

In short, just as holiness intrinsically involves the “objective” order of things, so likewise does the privative of holiness called sin.

4.9 The notion of the creature as *imago Dei*, in sum, implies recognition that the creature is never, in any aspect or at any moment of its meaning or existence, unaffected by grace and sin. This does not imply a denial of the essential natural integrity of the creature as such; it implies only that this natural integrity is never neutral with respect to the event of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ or to the Church that is the sacrament of this event.

4.10 These principles together indicate the historical order of the *imago Dei*. The point, then, is to integrate all the methods and objects of human intelligence into holiness as articulated in these principles.

In a word, and once again, our key presupposition is that *holiness, as inclusive of order, is thereby predicably analogously not only of (spiritual) subjectivity but of the objective structure and meaning of all entities in the cosmos.*

²³Cf. *Dominum et Vivificantem*: “Unfortunately, the resistance to the Holy Spirit which Saint Paul emphasizes in the *interior and subjective dimension* as tension, struggle and rebellion taking place in the human heart finds in every period of history and especially in the modern era its *external dimension*, which takes concrete form as the content of culture and civilization, as a *philosophical system, an ideology, a programme* for action and for the shaping of human behavior” (56).

²⁴Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 36–37; *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 16; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 75. Cf. Also John Paul II’s application of the notion of “structural sin” in *Centesimus Annus*, 38, and *Evangelium Vitae*, 12.

²⁵*Centesimus Annus*, 26. This liberation involves an intrinsic ordering toward sacrament (Baptism, Confession, Eucharist), hence toward the Church, which is the proper earthly “home” of liberation.

V. The Modern Academy

5.1. The concern of the present proposal is situated against the background of the history of educational institutions, especially in the West.

The modern academy's understanding of the order of intelligence—to put it in summary fashion—is expressed above all in the methodologies of and interrelationships among the various disciplines.

The hallmark of these modern (post-Enlightenment) methodologies, first of all, is their “formal-critical” nature. These methodologies typically grant primacy to form over content, this primacy being understood as the necessary condition for not prejudging the meaning and truth of the world. The hallmark of these methodologies, in other words, is their insistence both on the inquirer's *a priori* neutrality with respect to any content of meaning or truth, and on the inquirer's (methodical) control in determining that content. (Francis Bacon and Descartes, in their very different ways, can be mentioned as paradigms here, with their insistence that we must first remove “idols” or anteriorly accepted beliefs, or again first presume doubt as the most fundamental condition of intelligent inquiry.)

Secondly, the relationships among the methodologies of the modern disciplines are typically understood to be extrinsic (for example, “subalternated” one to another, through a kind of analogy conceived extrinsically), as a necessary condition of each discipline's legitimate autonomy.

5.2 We must seek to protect the (non-arbitrary) intelligence intended by the modern academy's “critical-methodical” approach to inquiry and by its disciplinary autonomy. At the same time, we need to reconsider the modern academy's understanding of what constitutes (non-arbitrary) intelligence, as reflected in the academy's dominant assumptions regarding the nature of method and of the relation among the disciplines. (Non-arbitrary) intelligence does not require the inquirer first to assume a primitive stance of neutrality and control with respect to already given substantive meaning and truth about God and the world—hence to be in this way “formal” and “critical”; and the modern academy's disciplinary autonomy signifies a fragmentation needing to be overcome.

Indeed, the modern academy's sense of the primacy of form over content and its separation among the disciplines are themselves already the expression of a substantive dualism, and hence not themselves purely formal; and this substantive dualism is already an expression of sin in its objective dimension—an expression, that is, of a failure to embody the “logic” of holiness or of the liturgical destiny of the cosmos.

5.3 This dualism manifests itself in different ways. On the one hand, it consists in a separation or false abstraction of the order of nature from the supernatural order or, more concretely, of the order of nature from the creational context that establishes nature as *imago Dei*. It consists in an opposition, or relation of simple juxtaposition, between sacrament and the natural world, or again, within the natural world itself, between object(ivity) and subject(ivity), intellect and will, *verum* and *bonum*, reason and freedom.

These dualisms, in sum, consist in an extrinsic relation between nature and God and the world and the Church and, within the order of nature itself, between truth or order and love.

5.4 Another dualism, that between mind and body or spirit and matter, could also be said to play a distinct foundational role in connection with the dualisms noted here. The presupposition, however, is that mind-body dualism is itself already a function (ontologically) of a loss of an integrated understanding of (physical) nature as created and therefore as made in the image of God, hence bearing some intrinsic-analogical trace of the “logos” and interiority of intelligence (and freedom). Mind-body dualism, in other words, is but a further dimension of what has been noted as the extrinsic relation between nature and God and the world and the Church.²⁶

²⁶The dualisms indicated here, moreover, could be shown to be linked with several other dualisms characteristic of thought in the modern academy, in ways requiring development elsewhere: “between theoretical and practical reason, between Apollo and Dionysus, idea and existence, between [a] conception of the spiritual world as valuable but impotent, and of the practical world as one of power but spiritual poverty” (Balthasar, “Theology and Sanctity,” in *Explorations in Theology*, Vol. I [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989], 194); between fact and value; between anthropos and cosmos; between reason and faith (cf. rationalism and

VI. The Secularization of Intelligence

6.1 These distinct but interrelated dualisms signify what may be called the divorce of the mind from the order of holiness. These dualisms, in other words, undergird and themselves already express a *secularizing of intelligence coincident with a “voluntarizing” of holiness.*

6.2 This secularization of intelligence coincident with the voluntarization of holiness indicates the core of what Nietzsche meant when he announced the “death of God” in the midst of a plenitude of relatively full churches. It likewise helps to interpret the paradox of the methodological (or “practical”) atheism present in an American society more than 90% of whose people profess (presumably sincerely) belief in God. Common to both situations is a *mind* that is no longer intrinsically related to God, however much the heart or will might remain so related; and, consequently, a God that no longer has anything intrinsic to do with the *order* of civilization.

The divorce of the mind from holiness—which is to say, the separation of the order of intelligence from God and the loss consequently of an intelligent sense of God—lie at the heart of the contemporary cultural crisis which John Paul II has framed in terms of a growing “culture of death,”²⁷ and identifies as a “structure of

fideism); between empirical-positivistic knowledge and “normative” knowledge; between the “accidental truths of history” and “the necessary truths of reason” (Lessing); and so on.

²⁷Cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 21. The main features of this culture of death are summarized eloquently in paragraphs 22 and 23 of *Evangelium Vitae*:

Consequently, when the sense of God is lost, the sense of man is also threatened and poisoned. As the Second Vatican Council concisely states: “Without the Creator the creature would disappear But when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible” [*Gaudium et Spes*, 36]. “Man . . . is somehow reduced to being a ‘thing,’ and no longer grasps the ‘transcendent’ character of his ‘existence as man.’ . . . Life itself becomes a mere ‘thing,’ which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation. . . .”

Thus, in relation to life at birth or at death, man is no longer capable of posing the question of the truest meaning of his own existence, nor can he assimilate with genuine freedom these crucial moments of his own history. He is

concerned only with 'doing,' and, using all kinds of technology, he busies himself with programming, controlling, and dominating birth and death. Birth and death, instead of being primary experiences demanding to be 'lived', become things to be merely 'possessed' or 'rejected'.

Moreover, once all reference to God has been removed, it is not surprising that the meaning of everything else becomes profoundly distorted. Nature itself, from being '*mater*' (mother), is now reduced to being 'matter,' and is subjected to every kind of manipulation. This is the direction in which a certain technical and scientific thinking, prevalent in present-day culture, appears to be leading when it rejects the very idea that there is a truth of creation which must be acknowledged, or a plan of God for life which must be respected. . . . Thus it is clear that the loss of contact with God's wise design is the deepest root of modern man's confusion

By living 'as if God did not exist,' man not only loses sight of the mystery of God, but also of the mystery of the world and the mystery of his own being (n. 22).

The eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a practical *materialism*, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism. Here too we see the permanent validity of the words of the Apostle: 'And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct' (Rom 1:28). The values of *being* are replaced by those of *having*. The only goal which counts is the pursuit of one's own material well-being. The so-called 'quality of life' is interpreted primarily or exclusively as economic efficiency, inordinate consumerism, physical beauty and pleasure, to the neglect of the more profound dimensions—interpersonal, spiritual, and religious—of existence.

In such a context *suffering*, an inescapable burden of human existence but also a factor of possible personal growth, is 'censored', rejected as useless, indeed opposed as an evil, always and in every way to be avoided. When it cannot be avoided and the prospect of even some future well-being vanishes, then life appears to have lost all meaning and the temptation grows in man to claim the right to suppress it.

Within this same cultural climate, the *body* is no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world. It is reduced to pure materiality: it is simply a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency. Consequently, sexuality too is depersonalized and exploited: from being the sign, place and language of love, that is, of the gift of self and acceptance of another, in all the other's richness as a person, it increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts. Thus the original import of human sexuality is distorted and falsified, with the two meanings, unitive and procreative, inherent in the very nature of the conjugal act, are artificially separated: in this way the marriage union is betrayed and its fruitfulness is subjected in the caprice of the couple. .

sin” (*peccati institutum*) (EV 20).

6.3 In sum: the foregoing indicates a need to overcome the divorce between mind (truth, objectivity) and holiness (good, subjectivity) presupposed in the modern academy’s prevailing order of intelligence, as reflected already in the sense of the primacy accorded form over content in the academy’s “formal-critical” methodologies, and in the extrinsic relation among its disciplines—*hence just so far also in the founding principles of the modern disciplines themselves.*

VII. (*Mechanistic*) Intelligence and (*Arbitrary*) Freedom

7.1 The divorce between the orders of intelligence and holiness has its origin above all in the “accidentalizing” of the historical reality of Jesus Christ: conceiving the event of Jesus Christ as a merely “positive” historical fact rather than as the utterly gratuitous event that (nonetheless) gives nature and history their deepest—indeed, original—meaning and order. As a consequence, Jesus Christ, and, in and through him, and in different ways, the trinitarian God and the sacramental and marian Church, become extrinsic—or more or less arbitrarily related—to the order of intelligence, to its methods and objects. The personal love revealed in Jesus Christ, and in all of these theological realities, is rendered marginal to the order of intelligence.

7.2 The result is a mind that is without real relation to God (atheism, methodological-“practical” or ontological-“theoretical”) or a real relation to God that is without mind (fideism or moralism); and, simultaneously, a mind that is without love or a love that is without mind. In a word, intelligence, with its objectivity, meaning, and truth, becomes rationalistic and

..
In the materialistic perspective described so far, *interpersonal relations are seriously impoverished*. The first to be harmed are women, children, the sick or suffering, and the elderly. The criterion of personal dignity—which demands respect, generosity and service—is replaced by the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness: others are considered not for what they ‘are’, but for what they ‘have, do and produce’. This is the supremacy of the strong over the weak (23).

mechanistic; while love, with its subjectivity and freedom, becomes nonrational and purely arbitrary.²⁸

7.3 The further result is the displacement of beauty (hence of the *opus gloriae*) as the intrinsic and deepest finality of human intelligence. Glory and beauty thus become matters of a nonrational and arbitrary subjectivity.

7.4 The “accidentalizing” of relation to God in Jesus Christ, with its attendant dualism between mind and love, thus results in a reduction of intelligent order to the order manifest in a machine, and of love to what now becomes simply voluntaristic, or arbitrary, movement. Order is mechanistic, and what does not manifest itself in a mechanistic fashion becomes just so far a matter of disorder.

This mechanistic order consists essentially in two principles: the principle of simple (static) identity, according to which x is related to others (God and others in God) first extrinsically—which relation is consequently understood first in terms of (simple) addition to x ; and the principle of power, according to which relations among entities (the relations involved, for example, in knowledge, causality, and the “social contract”) are understood first

²⁸It is important to see that the dualisms indicated here invariably give way to confusion (“con-fusion”: i.e., literally, mixing together in an inappropriate manner). That is, the orders of intelligence (cognition, truth, knowledge, objectivity) and of love (volition, good, freedom, subjectivity), conceived first in their separation from one another, tend consequently to be brought together in what is now a violent manner (violent, that is, because they now relate to each other simply from outside each other). Reason tends to become voluntaristic and arbitrary, even as acts of the will are understood to be essentially mechanistic and forceful.

Likewise, modern dualism typically inverts into reductionism: x (e.g., the body-machine), first separated from y (e.g., mind or spirit), now tends to expand, absorbing into itself y and y 's distinct order and activities. y , first excluded from x , now tends to be accounted for reductively in terms of x . The point, then, is that modern dualism is not the opposite of reductionism, as is customarily thought, but is rather the latter's always-anterior form. Modernity's reductionisms are but the inversion of its (just so far already presupposed) dualisms.

Thus (“postmodern”) criticisms of modern dualism(s) that would avoid the slip into confusion and reduction need to go to the true source of the problem, which, again, lies in modernity's failure to place nature from the outset in its creational-liturgical context.

in terms of the pushing and pulling of entities that are simply outside of and over against each other, hence in terms of external-forceful manipulation.

Mechanistic order as expressed in these two principles in fact implies (however unintentionally) a denial of the order proper to the creational-symbolic meaning and structure of things sketched earlier, which, again, signifies the primitive order of the call to holiness.

7.5 This intended criticism of mechanistic order does not entail a denial that things and their meanings have mechanical properties. After all, things do have their proper (self-)identity, and power-relations among things are not in all respects illegitimate. The intended criticism entails only that the (self-)identity of x be understood always-already to include dynamic relation to non- x (to God, to others)—that relation to non- x , in other words, never be understood first as a mere (extrinsic) addition to the already-constituted identity of x ; and that the dynamic relation of x to non- x , accordingly, never be understood as primarily or most basically a relation of (external) power. Indeed, the paradoxical truth is that the intrinsic dynamic relation of x to non- x , properly understood, entails a deepening rather than attenuating of the (legitimate) identity and power of x . The key to these important qualifiers, again, lies in a Trinity- (Christ-, sacrament-) centered analogy of being.

7.6 In sum: the dualism (concomitant with confusion and reductionism) indicated above, in all of its distinct variations, can be overcome only through recovery of a primitive sense of creation as *imago Dei*. Academic work thus needs to be anchored in a renewed centering of creation in the event of Jesus Christ, and proceeds by way of a Trinity-(Christ-, Spirit-, Church-) founded analogy of being within which glory and beauty are understood to have primacy, precisely as the guardians of all truth (and goodness).

VIII. Mechanistic Order and the Sin of Adam

8.1 It is essential to see that mechanistic order as just described is not the invention of modernity. On the contrary, mechanistic order, with its primacy of simple (static) identity and of (external) power as just qualified, as a violation of the order

proper to creation, has its origin in the *first violation of that order*: which is to say, in the *sin of Adam*.

The first sin consisted above all in Adam's abstraction of his self from relation to God. Adam attempted to (re-)constitute his identity outside of the relation to God in which he had been created. Adam's act, in a word, was an act of self-identification—an assertion of self-identity—that set aside the creaturely relation of prayer and obedience. And it was just this ontological structure of “in-dependence” (in relation to God) which then transformed Adam's relation to the world into a relation primarily of mastery and power (“you will be like gods, knowing good and evil”: Gen 3:5, 22) and of function (“the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and . . . desirable for the knowledge it could give”: Gen 3:6).

Here, then, is the radical origin of what has been termed mechanistic order, with its two interrelated principles of (simple-static) identity and (external-forceful) power.²⁹

8.2 Thus self-identification outside of relation to God already places the creature on the way toward disobedience and toward relations primarily of power and function. The simple identity proper to mechanistic order is therefore never neutral. On the contrary, its putative neutrality already signifies the removal of obedience as the first meaning of creaturely (self-)identity. Mechanistic order, in other words, indicates an already reduced and just so far false reading of the legitimate mechanical properties of identity and power, both of which always-already include intrinsic dynamic relation to the Other (God, others); and this holds true not only with respect to human beings, but also, in some genuinely analogical sense, with respect to all created beings and indeed to all cosmic meaning.

8.3 In light of the above, it becomes clear that the most pertinent distinction in the matter of the dominance of mechanistic order is not between the modern and either the pre- or post-modern, but between the supralapsarian and the infralapsarian. Indeed, the presupposition is that any criticism of modernity—in the name of either pre- or post- modernity—that does not

conceive its criticism most basically in terms of the primitive structure of sin will just so far fail to uncover what is most objectionable about modernity.

This does not mean that all “historical epochs” (premodern, modern, postmodern) are to be “relativized,” or simply equalized with each other, in terms of inclination to mechanistic order. It means only that any approach to the question of simple (self-) identity and power that is not theologically and ontologically integrated (in light of creation understood as made in the image of the trinitarian God, and as disfigured by sin) will finally falsify the nature of identity and relation (non-identity), and (consequently) of power.³⁰ The premodern, modern, and postmodern epochs all share, in significantly different ways, in this falsification, precisely for the reason that each of them—again, in significantly different ways—lacks such an integration.

8.4 Granted, then, that no historical period escapes the false (self-)identification and primacy of power that give Adam’s sin its ontological structure, modernity has nonetheless given these principles a particular prominence, by making them *thematic* in its ordering of intelligence. The modern academy has made the principles of (static-atomistic) identity and (external-forceful) power central in its prevailing disciplinary modes of thought and its hallmark “formal-critical” methods as described above.

8.5 *In this sense, the deepest problems of the modern academy may be said to lie in a double tendency toward “Pelagianism” and nominalism (onto-logical atomism):* the relation of the individual creature to God and to others is first extrinsic, becoming then (simultaneously, and

³⁰The point here bears emphasis. Clearly there are trends in the contemporary academy that would deny modernity’s (putative) methodological “neutrality” and the primacy of the modern inquirer’s “control” of the “given,” and that would also criticize modernity’s fragmentation of knowledge (cf., e.g., “New Age” and “postmodernism”). Criticisms of modernity that would identify the source of what is objectionable in modernity, however, can accurately do so only if they proceed by way of a diagnosis rooted finally in an adequate notion of creation (Trinity- and Christ- and sacrament- centered analogy of being). The distinctiveness of our intended criticism of modernity, therefore, relative to criticisms made (for example) by New Age and postmodernism, hinges first of all on the distinctiveness of its notion of creation.

however unintentionally) a matter first of the individual creature's (voluntary) initiative and effective power and hence construction. Pelagianism and nominalism, in other words, are but the proper names for the modern notions of the static (self-)identity of creatures and of their power relations to God and to others as described above.

Pelagianism and nominalism each have (via the analogy of being) both anthropological and cosmological dimensions, and these affect both the metaphysical and the gnoseological aspects—hence both the contents and the methods—of the modern academy's ordering of intelligence.

IX. *Modernity, Premodernity, Postmodernity*

9.1 The spirit of the approach to the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various periods of Western history intended here is summarized well by Balthasar in terms of the history of Christian theology: "It might well be," he says, "that . . . [t]he course of the history of theology from the Fathers to the Scholastics to the Moderns . . . represent[s] a progressive waning of mental and synthetic powers. But that would in no way affect [the main] point, that the sequence of the formal laws of these periods has brought what is distinctively Christian to more and more clarity."³¹ Balthasar explains his meaning here as follows:

[P]atristics, seen in a highly formal perspective, represents the eternal factor of the truth of the Christian "clean sweep" of the world [*Weltauskehr*] to the point of the complete death and disappearance of the creature before the God who is "all in all" and must always become so more and more. The ceaseless reduction of the levels of being to the highest Being (an insight that lies at the heart of Platonic logic); its transcendence from all merely participating being; a deep ontological piety according to which existence itself is a prayer (as the corresponding echo of this presence of being in the realm of consciousness); the feeling for the fact that the creature is nothing other than the presentation and representation of God outside of himself; and thus a deep

³¹"Patristics, Scholastics, and Ourselves," in *Communio* 24 (Summer, 1997), 347–396, at 385–86.

understanding of the cultic, of the objectivity of the symbolic and sacramental world order: All of these are the eternal values of the patristic era.

But what detracts from them is that an all-too simple schema of the God-creature relationship lies at their roots; or put better, that the authentic Christian schema had to be maintained, as it were, against the stream of Platonic and pantheizing logic. This defect disappears when the patristic principle lets itself be supplemented by the scholastic principle. And thus purified, it then refines itself using the insights of modernity. For here in the modern era, the principle of "God being all in all" is realizable without abbreviation and even more consistently, because now *the sovereignty and totality of God no longer comes into view at the cost of the world's being but precisely as its fulfillment*. "I no longer need to be dead," says Claudel, "that you might live." God is God so much that he himself can be in the All that he is not.

The modification in the spiritual attitude that is contained in this transition from patristic to modern piety can be described as the change from a world-condemning "dying to the world" to a world-affirming "dying to the world." . . . The patristic sense for the objectivity and representation need not give way, then, to a more predominant subjectivism and anthropocentrism (as the line is always being incorrectly drawn). Rather, in the principle of the modern, this feeling for objectivity and representation comes precisely to its fulfillment, at least when every "subjectivity" of ecstatic ascent to God remains encompassed by the meaning and consciousness of Christian mission.³²

9.2 In the spirit indicated here, we affirm both premodernity's defense of the primacy of the creature's relation to God and modernity's concern for the (natural) integrity of creaturely identity and power. The point on which we would insist, in contrast in different ways to both premodernity and modernity, is that the creature's relation to God is the necessary anterior condition for realizing the proper integrity of creaturely identity and power: that the former relation, in other words, is directly not inversely related to the latter integrity.

In sum, our proposal is to develop and display this truth above all in terms of the patterns of thought dominant in the

³²Ibid., 391–92.

current academic-cultural situation, which privilege mechanistic order as the most adequate expression of the integrity of creaturely identity and power. □

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