

NORRIS CLARKE ON PERSON, BEING, AND ST. THOMAS

Fr. Norris Clarke has recently published an important book on St. Thomas's metaphysics of the human person (*Person and Being* [=PB], [Marquette University Press, 1993]). The book, presented in the distinguished Aquinas Lecture series at Marquette, expands considerably on an article by Clarke which appeared in *Communio* ("Person, Being, and St. Thomas" [=PBST] [Winter 1992]: 601-18). Clarke calls his reflection a "creative retrieval and completion" of St. Thomas's own dynamic notion of being: although Aquinas understood being as intrinsically self-communicative and relational through action (cf. the work of de Finance and Gilson), he never really developed this thematically in his *philosophical* notion of the person. Clarke therefore seeks to remedy this.

Much indebted to Fr. Clarke in my own studies in metaphysics over the years, I would like with this note to try to nudge him still further along the exciting path he has opened up within Thomism.

The issue to be brought into relief is basic to Clarke's project: where in the human person is relationality first anchored, and in what sense are self-communicativity and receptivity complementary perfections of the human person? I will first outline Clarke's position on this issue, and then indicate my own questions and proposals, concluding with comments on why the issue is particularly significant today.

I.

Clarke's position, I think, is accurately summarized in the following statements:

Not only is activity, active self-communication, the natural consequence of possessing an act of existence (*esse*); St. Thomas goes further to maintain that self-expression through action is actually the whole point, the natural perfection or flowering of being itself. . . . (PBST, 604)

What is clearly implied, however, though not as explicit, is the corollary that *relationality* is a primordial dimension of every real being, inseparable from its substantiality, just as action is from existence. (PBST, 607)

But since "every substance exists for the sake of its operations," as St. Thomas has just told us, being as substance, as existing *in itself*, naturally flows over into being as relational, turned towards others by its self-communicating action. (PBST, 607)

For St. Thomas, personality in the ontological sense, i.e., to be a person, is rooted in the act of existing: to be a person is to be an intellectual nature possessing its own unique act of existing so as to be the autonomous source of its own actions. (PBST, 609)

Aquinas does indeed call the act of existence by which a being is present to itself, as standing out of nothingness, the "first act" of the being, and the action or operation proceeding from it, which grounds its relationality, its "second act." There is indeed a priority of dependence here: the second act is rooted in and flows from the first. But this does not mean that this second act is secondary in importance, or purely accidental in the sense that the being could be a real being whether it expresses itself in action or not. On the contrary, the second act is

the very goal and fulfillment in being of the first act, its ultimate *raison d'être*. Relationality is, therefore, in principle for St. Thomas himself, an equally primordial dimension of being as substantiality. Let us say so explicitly. (PB, 14-15)

Clarke's interpretation of Aquinas seems clear: the *esse* which makes the substance be simply, that is, the act whereby the substance exists in itself, is not indifferent to relation. On the contrary, *esse* is ordered to its operations, to the *agere* which is conceived as self-communicating action. The actual substance is not complete until it is turned toward others through its action.

Furthermore, Clarke then goes on to say that "receptivity is the necessary complement of active self-communication and of equal dignity and perfection as the latter. Self-donation would be incomplete without welcoming receptivity on the other side of the personal relation. And this belongs to the very perfection of the love relationship itself" (PBST, 612; cf. PB, 82ff).

We may thus summarize the main elements of Clarke's position as follows: (1) *Esse* or first act "grounds" the substance or substantial nature of the person: makes the substance be "in itself." (2) This first act is nonetheless not complete until it flows over into *agere* or second act, which grounds the substance's relation to others. That is, relation is properly anchored in *agere* and not *esse*, although *esse* is intrinsically ordered toward *agere*. (Relation thus begins properly in the second act of the substance, although not thereby in a sense which could rightfully be called accidental.)

It is in this sense that "to be a person is to be an intellectual nature

possessing its own unique act of existing so as to be the autonomous source of its own actions." That is, the point is "'self-mastery for self-giving'" [Maritain] (PBST, 610; PB, 77).

(3) Finally, receptivity is the necessary complement to self-communicativity, and is to be understood both as active and as a perfection.

II.

There is much richness in Clarke's argument as set forth here: he has brought clearly into relief dimensions of Thomistic metaphysics which have heretofore received inadequate emphasis: relation and receptivity. Building these features into our notion of the human person is not a matter merely of accommodating to contemporary sensibilities, important as that may be; it is of course a matter of truth—indeed, of fidelity to a truth that seems implied by Christian faith itself. There are nonetheless two crucial points in Clarke's way of introducing relation and receptivity that seem to me to warrant further scrutiny. These bear in turn on his grounding of relationality properly in second act (*agere*), rather than already in first act (*esse*); and on his sense of receptivity as a complement to self-communicativity.

(1) Regarding the first point: clearly, Clarke does not leave *esse* indifferent to relation. Indeed, *esse* tends of its own inner dynamic toward the *agere* which (in the human person) grounds relationality. But what is it about *esse* that already—inherently—inclines "it" toward relation? According to Clarke, *agere*, the ("second") act which grounds

relationality, is "rooted in" esse, the ("first") act "by which a being is present to itself": what is the implication of "rooted in"? Finally, "rooted in" either implies that relationality already in some significant sense begins—has its foundation—in esse, or it does not, in which case it follows rather that relationality begins simply in *agere*. But, if the latter is true, does this not mean that relation is something not strictly "required" by the inner dynamic of esse, and is in this sense still too "accidental"?

My question, then, concerns Clarke's way of distinguishing between esse as the source of a being's presence to itself ("in-itselfness") and *agere* as the source of a being's opening to the other (other-relatedness). How can relationality in fact be said to be—as Fr. Clarke himself says it is—"an equally primordial dimension of being as substantiality," if relationality begins not in first but in second act?

(2) The meaning of this question requires completion in the light of the second question noted above: namely, that regarding the relative priority of receptivity and self-communicativity.

Clarke characteristically emphasizes the priority of the active self-communication that is "the natural consequence of possessing an act of existence" (PBST, 604): this is what moves us toward others. Receptivity then is the necessary complement to this self-communication: an effective communication entails a corresponding receptivity (PB, 83). As a necessary complement to self-communication, receptivity thus becomes equally a "positive perfection of being" (PB, 83). In-

deed, this is one of the defects in classical metaphysics (e.g., in Aristotle, and in Aquinas following Aristotle): namely, that receptivity has been identified "with the deficiency side of being, i.e., with poverty, potentiality, a prior lack that is later filled up" (PB, 83).

Although Clarke would seem thus to be unequivocal in his affirmation of receptivity as a positive perfection, we must also take note of what he says elsewhere: "The initial relationality of the human person towards the outer world of nature and other persons is primarily receptive, in need of actualizing its latent potentialities from without. The human person as child first goes out towards the world as poor, as appealingly but insistently needy" (PB, 72-73, emphasis added). Clarke then goes on: "Thus the receptive dimension dominates at first in the development of the human person to full self-possession and self-manifestation. Then the active, freely initiated response side emerges more and more fully into full self-conscious actuality, enabling us, as we approach personal maturity, to advance *pari passu*, with both sides of our being, giving and receiving . . ." (PB, 73).

My question is whether Clarke's emphasis in these latter statements on receptivity as a sign of a poverty (immaturity, potentiality) needing to be overcome (maturity, actualization), or again on the contrast of early receptivity with later active, freely initiated response, does not disclose an ambiguity that is crucial, with respect to his own affirmation of receptivity as a positive perfection of being. How can receptivity be conceived as a perfection of being, that is,—in Clarke's understand-

ing—as a complement to self-communicative *agere*, and at the same time be equated with a potentiality (poverty) needing to be actualized (enriched)? I do not doubt that receptivity in the creature does in some sense have to be both at the same time: there is a sense in which receptivity in the creature is a sign of poverty as "neediness," but there is also a sense in which that receptivity—as Clarke himself clearly wants to affirm—remains a positive perfection as the child moves on into adulthood. My question is whether these different senses do not need to be further clarified: most particularly, in the present context, in terms of the distinct meaning of receptivity as a properly metaphysical perfection.

Here, then, is the road along which I would like to nudge Clarke further. What his argument still requires, it seems to me, is a fuller account of *how* receptivity, as a positive perfection, is proper to act. Put more radically: Clarke needs yet to show us why receiving-from, and to this extent "emptiness" and "poverty," can be said truly to be "actual" and thus "perfect."

There can be no illusion about the delicacy and difficulty of the issue raised here. To get at its precise meaning, I turn to the theologian to whom Clarke expresses his own indebtedness on the matter of receptivity (PB, 86; PBST, 612), namely, Hans Urs von Balthasar. For Balthasar, the notion of receptivity as a perfection derives from the Christian understanding of God as trinitarian. It is of the very nature of the Son (Logos) that he is eternally from the Father, even as the Son remains equal to the Father in this eter-

nal difference as receptive. Being receptive—being from another: hence being a "child"—is thereby revealed to be something positive, not negative.

What happens when we turn to the order of creation? First, we need to recall that all things are created in the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ (Jn 1:1-3). All things, therefore, are created in the image of Jesus Christ (in the image of Christ who is himself "the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation" [Col 1:15]). All creatures, made in and through Christ, thereby "image" him—precisely in his receptivity to the Father. To be sure, there is only one hypostatic union: only Christ is from the Father in a way that is coincident with absolute equality with the Father. The point is simply that Christ's proper reality nonetheless lies always in being from the Father, and thus always in being a "child": Christ is perfect (divine) precisely in his childlikeness.

In the light of this, the most basic thing to be said about creatures is that they are "children" in the "Child." Creatures "image" God not first as Father (he who goes out of himself, who pours himself forth, who communicates himself), but as Son (he who receives from another, who is communicated). They "image" the perfection of God not first as "agent" but as "patient": they are empowered to "represent" the "agency" of the Father only in and through the "patience" of the Son. In a word, they "image" first the God who, in Jesus Christ, is revealed to be receptive and thus childlike; only then (that is, always in and by virtue of the receptivity proper to childlikeness) do they "image" the

self-communicative activity proper to father-likeness.

Certainly there is much that needs yet to be sorted out: the "poverty" of Christ indicated here to be a perfection, because it is coincident with Christ's absolute equality with the Father, must be distinguished from the poverty of the creature, which, because it is coincident with the creature's absolute inequality with the Father, must thereby in some essential sense be a sign of deficiency. (In accord with the principle of analogy affirmed at the Fourth Lateran Council, any similarity between creature and God must be seen in the light of their ever-greater difference [*maior dissimilitudo*] [cf. *Catéchisme de L'Église*, pars. 41-43].) Nonetheless—notwithstanding this ever-greater difference—the creature's being-from, insofar as it "images" Christ's own being-from, remains thereby *first* a perfection.

Such, in brief, is Balthasar's line of argument for the perfection of receptivity. Indeed, the argument is central to his work. As he says in a little book written at the end of his life (*Unless You Become Like This Child* [Ignatius Press, 1991]), birth from God—childhood—is the very *leitmotiv* of Christianity (43-44). Thus it is not at all accidental that two of the philosophers ("Thomists") who most influenced Balthasar made childhood a central theme of their writings: namely, Gustav Siewerth (cf. *Metaphysik der Kindheit* [Johannes Verlag, 1957]), and Ferdinand Ulrich (cf. *Der Mensch als Anfang: Zur philosophischen Anthropologie der Kindheit* [Johannes Verlag, 1970]). These books help to show (*inter alia*) the sense in which the receptivity-poverty proper to childhood is a "per-

fection" never to be superseded by any developing or mature consciousness (cf. Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* [= *GL*] V [Ignatius Press, 1991], 616, 633).

Again, the sense of receptivity as a perfection affirmed by Balthasar has its origins in theology. Nonetheless, as illustrated in the work of Siewerth and Ulrich, this theology has ontological—and thus distinctly philosophical—implications. Revelation on a Catholic reading is never to be interpreted positivistically. In any event, Clarke seems himself to accept in principle the notion of Christian philosophy that is required here: namely, that faith anticipates truths which can then be given a distinctly philosophical meaning (cf., e.g., *PBST*, 617-18). My question, then, is how the perfection of receptivity indicated by Balthasar's interpretation of Christianity translates into properly metaphysical terms. More precisely, my question is what this sense of perfection entails with respect to Clarke's metaphysics of relation and receptivity.

(3) Let us recall the main elements of Clarke's argument. He intends to affirm relation as a primordial perfection of the human person. To accomplish this, he distinguishes *esse* as the "ground" of "in-itselfness" from *agere* as the "ground" of relationality understood first as self-communicativity (movement toward). He then complements self-communicativity with receptivity (movement from). Clearly, on his own principles, receptivity is thereby included within the meaning of *agere*, and in this way is a perfection. But an ambiguity nonetheless persists on just this point: receptivity, insofar as it is a perfection, tends to be such only as

(ontologically) "consequent" to communicativity; receptivity, insofar as it "precedes" communicativity, tends on the contrary still to be viewed as a deficiency (cf. the immaturity of the child).

My question is whether this metaphysics of relation and receptivity is adequate either to the meaning of creation as sketched above or to Clarke's own intention of affirming relation—in both its communicative and receptive dimensions—as a primordial perfection of being.

(a) Regarding our creation in the Logos become incarnate in Jesus Christ: does this not imply that we "image" God first in his trinitarian meaning as revealed in Jesus Christ: that we thus "represent" the communicativity proper to the Father only in and through the receptivity proper to the Son? In a word, do we not receive all that we are from the trinitarian God in Jesus Christ?

In metaphysical terms, this seems to indicate both a relation that begins already in the constitution of the being of the creature, and a relation that is thereby primarily receptive in nature. It seems therefore to require: (i) that relation be already inscribed in the act by which the creature *is*—hence in *esse*; and (ii) that receptivity signify the *first* meaning of relation in the creature.

My question to Clarke in this context is thus whether his grounding of relation in *agere*, and indeed in *agere* understood first as self-communication, does not (i) make relation in the creature first a matter of the creature's construction—that is, a matter of a *doing* which would then imply (ii) that the creature's imaging of God is first of God as Father, or indeed first of a "monopolar"

God rather than the trinitarian God revealed in Christ. Is a relation grounded in *agere* sufficient for the radical sense of relation indicated in receiving our *being* from God in Christ? Is a relation grounded in an *agere* that is first self-communicative sufficient for the radical sense of relation indicated in receiving our being from God in Christ?

(b) Further, then, regarding Clarke's intention of affirming relation-receptivity as a perfection of being: can relation be said finally to be a perfection of being if it is not begun already in *esse*, the act whereby being itself is first "perfect"? Indeed if, as Clarke himself affirms, "personal being is the highest mode of being, the most perfect expression of what it means to be" (*PBST*, 601), how can the relation which he wants to call a perfection of the person not—in some significant sense—be inscribed already in what it means to *be*? In the case of created being, of one whose being is a being-from (which images Christ's own being-from: *maior dissimilitudo*), how can this relation which is a perfection of the person not first be receptive?

My question to Clarke in this context is whether his anchoring of relation in *agere* does not thereby imply still that relation is something of an imperfection: because tied properly to an act that is second and not first. This question intensifies in the light of Clarke's understanding of *agere* first as self-communicative, and only somewhat ambivalently (in the way indicated) as also receptive. How can a receptive relation thus understood still as imperfect be said properly to image the receptive relation which, in Jesus Christ, is re-

vealed in principle—in its first and most basic meaning—to be “perfect”?

(c) What alternative metaphysics of relation and receptivity do I then propose, in order to be adequate both to the doctrine of creation and to the notion of receptive relation as a primordial perfection of being? (i) Receptivity must be begun already in *esse*, and not first in *agere*. The human-creaturely *esse* is first *esse-ab*. (ii) Receptivity (*esse-ab*) is thus prior (ontologically) to communicativity (*esse-ad*): in the human creature, being-receptive (*esse-ab*) is the anterior condition for first “possessing” being (*esse-in*) or indeed for being-for-others (*esse-ad*). (iii) The primitive meaning of *agere* is given in this threefold structure of *esse*: *agere* consists properly in taking over and “recapitulating,” in freedom, the being-from and thus the receptivity, which then remains the anterior condition for actively “possessing” or “mastering” oneself, and thereby for communicating oneself to others. In a word, human *agere* is structurally contemplative before it is active, and must remain contemplative *in* its action.

In sum, my alternative proposal to Clarke is that the *esse* which “grounds” the substantiality (“in-itselfness”) of the created person (hence *esse-in*) is itself, anteriorly-distinctly, an *esse-ab* (be-ing-from), even as it is, distinctly but simultaneously, also an *esse-ad* (be-ing-for/toward). There is thus a triple dimension structured already into the *esse* of the creature, with *esse-ab* having (ontological) priority.

I do not see how one can secure, simultaneously, both the meaning and the perfection proper to created

being, precisely in its character as *created*, if one does not build *ab* (movement from), and thereby a relation that is receptive, already into *esse* in this way.

(d) Let us conclude this section by recalling still another Christian teaching. John Paul II, in his *Mulieris Dignitatem*, says that Mary is the archetype of all human beings (see pars. 4, 5, 29). She is archetype first in her receptive *fiat*. Clearly, the *fiat* is a free act (*agere*). But it serves as archetype of creaturely being in that, as a free act, it confirms and recapitulates the prior truth of created being as gift: the *fiat* “repeats” in freedom the receptive relation (to God) that is already constitutive of the proper meaning of the created order. In a word, Mary’s *agere* becomes the archetype for every human *agere* precisely in its taking up and affirming the *esse-ab* that is structurally prior in the creature.

III.

Of course, this proposal, with all of its brevity and starkness, invites in its turn a host of further questions demanding further distinctions and qualifications. Let me here anticipate only a few of the larger questions.

(1) First, the proposal in no way entails rejection of the distinction between *esse* and *essence* or substance which is fundamental to the meaning of creatureliness. If I might put the matter in a historical context: I mean to affirm Gilson’s sense of the primacy of *esse* in relation to *essence* (as distinct, for example, from William Carlo’s sense of that primacy, which reduces *essence* finally

to *esse*). At the same time, I wish to incorporate into *esse*, in a thematic way that Gilson did not, the distinctive features of *ab* (from) and *ad* (toward), with a priority accorded to *ab* (from).

For Gilson, *esse* is prior to *essence* or substance, in a sense requiring *esse* to affect the substance from its core, even as *esse* does not thereby destroy the substance in its integrity. What I am making thematic is that the *esse* which is prior in this way is at once *ab*, *in*, and *ad*: the very integrity of substance “in itself” (*in*) is thus always already inclusive of a relation that is anteriorly receptive (*ab*) even as it is simultaneously communicative (*ad*).

(2) Linked with this question of the *esse*-substance distinction is the fear that grounding relation in *esse* would lead to the dissolution of substance or substantial identity: would lead, that is, to a “processive” view of reality.

The charge of “process” seems to me to involve a *petitio principii*, so long as it is advanced without an argument showing the contrary of what I have proposed. Such a charge, in other words, requires an argument showing *why esse-in* is or need be exclusive of *esse-ab* and *esse-ad*.

Indeed, that is just the point: the charge seems to presuppose from the outset an inverse rather than direct relation between “in-itselfness” and “other-relatedness”: at least to the extent of assuming that both of these features cannot be rooted primitively and thus simultaneously in the same act (*esse*). But such an inverse relation seems unwarranted, both (a) by our experience, and (b) by a sense of *esse* as image of the divine *Esse*.

With regard to (a), what aspect of our identity does not bear traces of a relation to the other: bear evidence of a relation which neither leaves the core of our identity *untouched*, nor comes somehow *after* the constitution of that core? The depth of the relation indicated here would seem to suggest that relationality is anchored already in the first act of the substance (*esse*); and that the first act of the substance is therefore already and as a matter of principle open to the other (*ab* and *ad*), even as this first act simultaneously makes substance itself be (*in*).

In a word, the fear that affirmation of a primacy of *esse*, coincident with a structuring of relation (from and for) already into *esse*, would entail a dissolution of substantial identity seems to me to presuppose just what is in question: namely, whether an act that “determines” substance in the way *esse* does cannot at the same time—inherently and dynamically—*open* substance to the other.

With regard to (b), why do we assume a priori that *esse* must be “monopolar” in character? Should not Christian faith, which tells us that *esse* images *Esse* only in and through Jesus Christ—thus in and through one whose very being is a being-from-and-for—lead us rather to anticipate otherwise? To be sure, we need a notion of analogy here that, once again, recognizes the ever-greater difference between created *esse* and uncreated *Esse* (*maior dissimilitudo*). But it is not at all clear why such an analogy would require that the image of God that begins already in the *esse* of the creature (in *esse* as the source of the creature’s being and hence perfection) should be restricted to a “determining” (or

monopolar) function, and not also include (in some significant sense) the movement from and toward which characterizes *Esse* in its concrete trinitarian fullness as revealed in Christ.

(3) The suggestion that *esse* images an *Esse* that is trinitarian, in a way involving a *maior dissimilitudo*, reminds us again that we have yet to develop the sense in which relation, and particularly the relation of receptivity, is, in the creature, also a sign of profound deficiency. Clearly, the relation(s) proper to created *esse* entail "neediness" in a way that the relation(s) within uncreated *Esse* do not. But that is just the point of retaining the fundamental distinction between *esse* and essence. The "neediness" that signifies deficiency in the creature derives properly from the side of essence—and indeed from "matter": that is, from whatever is "potential" with respect to, and thus limits, *esse*.

To be sure, this still leaves much to be developed regarding the meaning of "potency," and of the "act-potency" relationship. It nonetheless suffices here merely to recall the burden of my argument, which is not that relation in the creature is not also defective, or again, is not also intrinsically tied to "potency." The argument simply insists that defectiveness and thus potency do not signify the *first* meaning of other-relatedness, *even in the creature*. To assume otherwise—to assume, that is, that a relation which is always (also) defective must thereby be *primarily* or *exhaustively* defective—is to beg precisely what is at issue.

(4) There remains a crucial ambiguity in what I have referred to throughout as relatedness to the

other: who or what is meant by "other"? For example, even granting the truth of all that I have said insofar as it concerns the creature's (human person's) relation to God, what follows for the creature's relation to other creatures?

Clearly, the human person's relation to God is constitutive in a way that its relation to other human persons is not, and the sense of this ever-greater difference, once again, must be worked out carefully. My assumption has been that a constitutive relation from and toward God (*Esse*) establishes in the creature—in some significant sense: in principle—an intrinsic relation also from and toward all that participates in *Esse*. The constitutive relation from and for God, in other words, inscribes in the creature something like a "transcendental" movement from and for all that is created by *Esse*, in and through Jesus Christ. In lieu of developing the needed argument on this profoundly difficult and important point, I note again some anticipations of its truth as given in Christian faith.

In the concrete order of history, human persons come into existence already (in some significant sense) in solidarity with "Adam" and with Jesus Christ ("the second Adam"). Does not the doctrine of original sin presuppose that each of us already receives from the others before we "do" anything in relation to them? Are we not all recipients of sin before we enact it (*agere*)? Does not our solidarity in Christ (cf. Jn 1:1-3; Col 1:15-18: "Before anything was created, he existed, and he holds all things in unity") imply a unity among all persons that precedes their own enactment (*agere*)—a

unity, that is, which is based on the principle not of pantheism but of the hypostatic union (cf. Balthasar, *GL I* [Ignatius Press, 1982], 679), but which for all that still has implications for the real order of being?

My supposition is that we cannot make adequate sense of our solidarity either with Adam or with Christ if we do not anchor that solidarity first in *esse*—given both the radical sense of relation required, and the meaning of *esse* as the act which is first and deepest in the constitution of our being.

(5) My argument has not treated thematically the distinction in the created order between human and sub-human beings. The presupposition of the argument in this respect has been twofold: first, all creatures, by virtue of their very *ratio* as creatures, have receptive relation inscribed in their *esse*. All creatures thus bear the dimension of interiority, and hence immateriality, needed to accommodate such a relation (cf. Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift* [Marquette University Press, 1982]). Secondly, interiority in the case of human beings, in contrast to sub-human beings, is distinctly spiritual. It is thus only in the case of the human being that the receptive relation anchored already in *esse* can be freely retrieved and hence fully entered into. Only in the human being, in other words, does receptive relation become properly personal.

What my argument still requires is thus an account of interiority, and a *fortiori*, of spirituality: in terms of how these are necessary to account (in ways proportionate to the sub-human and human respectively) for a relation which (as receptive) is truly internal to the being of the

creature, but which for all that does not destroy the substantial identity of the creature. This fuller account exceeds the scope of this note, even as it remains essential for final completion of my argument.

IV.

In conclusion, I offer some texts that indicate why the issues raised are of particular significance for us today, in America. The first group of texts is from John Courtney Murray, whose work has profoundly influenced Catholicism's engagement with American culture in recent decades. My concern is not directly with the political dimension of Murray's proposals, but with the ontology of the human person that mediated his approach to the culture more generally. That ontology is reflected in the following statements:

[What] is juridically relevant, and relevant in the most fundamental sense, is the personal autonomy which is constituent of man's dignity. More exactly, resident in man's dignity is the exigence to act on his own initiative and on his own responsibility. . . . And this exigence is the basic ontological foundation, not only of the right to religious freedom, but of all man's fundamental rights. ("The Declaration on Religious Freedom" [= *DRF*], in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. by John H. Miller [Notre Dame: Assoc'd Press, 1966], 565-76, at 572)

[T]he basic exigence of the person is for immunity from coercion . . . (*DRF*, 572)

[The notion of the human person] is, of course, known through reason, but it is also known through revelation, where man is clearly proclaimed to have been created in the "Image of God": that is to

say, man is a creature of intelligence and free will called upon to have dominion over his own actions and to be the one who directs the course of his own life. ("Religious Liberty and Development of Doctrine," An interview with John C. Murray, by Edward Gaffney, *The Catholic World* 204 [February, 1967]: 277-83, at 282)

The second group of texts is from John Paul II:

[T]he Church in our time attaches great importance to all that is stated by the Second Vatican Council in its *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, both the first and the second part of the document. We perceive intimately that the truth revealed to us by God imposes on us an obligation. (*Redemptor Hominis* [=RH], par. 12)

Jesus Christ meets the man of every age, including our own, with the same words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32). (RH, par 12)

Christ the Lord indicated [the] way, when, as the Council teaches, "by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man" (*Gaudium et Spes*, par. 22). (RH, par. 13)

We are not dealing with the "abstract" man, but the real, "concrete," "historical" man. We are dealing with "each" man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself for ever through this mystery. . . . [T]his is man in all the fullness of the mystery in which he has become a sharer in Jesus Christ, the mystery in which each one of the four thousand million human beings living on our planet has become a sharer from the moment he is conceived beneath the heart of his mother. (RH, par. 13)

Mary is totally dependent upon God and completely directed toward him, and, at

the side of her Son, she is *the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe*. (*Redemptoris Mater*, par. 37, citing the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* [March 22, 1986], 97)

What follows from a mutual engagement of these two groups of texts, when they are interpreted in the light of the question above regarding relation and receptivity?

Note the emphasis of Murray on autonomy: the exigence of the person is to act on his own initiative, and this exigence is the ontological foundation for all human rights, including the right to religious freedom. Indeed, acting on one's own initiative is what it means to be created in the image of God: "man is a creature of intelligence and free will called upon to have dominion over his own actions and to be the one who directs the course of his own life." It follows from the priority of the human person's initiative that his basic exigence is for immunity from coercion—that is, from undue influence from others.

The emphasis in Murray, then, is first on what the person *does* (*agere*), and indeed he takes this to be the foundational image of God in the creature. He consequently defines a "right" first in terms of a relation that is negative: immunity from. Since the first act of the person is outward-directed, it follows that the person's right is to be construed in terms of a clearing of one's path, so to speak, so that one can in fact move outward in unimpeded fashion.

Different presuppositions operate in the texts from John Paul II. The burden of his statement seems to be

precisely that the individual person's participation in community precedes his own initiative, and that the person's most basic exigence is thus to receive what has always-already been given. The individual person's being is constituted already in the relation to God in Jesus Christ, and this relation is somehow shared with all other human persons. The receptivity entailed here, above all in relation to God but also in some significant sense in relation to others, must be recapitulated in every human action. This is why, for John Paul II, Mary in her *fiat* is "the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity."

But, if Mary is the most perfect image for freedom, and if the pope's primarily theological context is intended to carry (also) a distinctly *ontological* meaning (the pope is no theological positivist), then it would seem to follow that the *most basic* exigence of the human person is *not* to initiate; that the human person does *not* image God *first* in having dominion over his acts and directing the course of his life; that the exigences thus for initiative and dominion and self-direction are *not* the *most basic* ontological foundation for rights; and, finally, that the *deepest* demand of the human person is *not* for immunity from (not a negative relation).

Clearly all of the features emphasized by Murray are essential ingredients in the pope's conception of the human person, as they are indeed in any adequate conception of the person. The pope's affirmations nonetheless imply that these features bear their proper meaning only in a context wherein relation and hence receptivity to the other are anterior. Be-

ing bound in love—the "obligation" (*obligo*) is first a matter of love because the "given" (*datum*) of creation is a "gift" (*donum*)—is the most basic feature of the human being. This receptivity, and the "obligation" implied therein, must therefore be taken up and carried over into each of the human being's actions. Hence there is no human *agere* concerning which it is accurate to say that it *first* initiates and directs itself, and, consequently, whose relation to the other is *first* the negative one of immunity. The truth of the matter is rather that human *agere*, always and everywhere, is anteriorly a response to what is given, a response, radically, which always carries *within it* the prior initiative of the Other (and indeed, in some sense, of the other).

Thus when the pope recommends *Dignitatis Humanae* to us, and then instructs us to take notice of "both the first and the second part of the document," he is not merely being redundant. Rather, he is introducing a corrective in the reading of that document which has prevailed in the years since the Council. The corrective consists in drawing attention to the need to interpret the "general principle of religious freedom" (Part I) "in the light of revelation" (Part II): because the act of freedom presupposes one's being bound (*anteriorly*) to the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The meaning of the pope's corrective of course bears not only on the meaning of religious freedom, but on the meaning of freedom—*agere* as a free and intelligent act—more generally. The corrective, in the ways I have indicated, thus affects each of the features Murray sees as attendant on personal autonomy.

Let us return to the question with which we began: where in the constitution of the human person do we first anchor relation, most particularly the relation that is receptive? It should be clear now that the issue regarding the distinction between *esse* and *agere*, as it involves relation, and again regarding the relative priority of receptivity and communicativity, is not an arcane matter, of serious import only for metaphysicians. The issue on the contrary lies embedded at the heart of the Murray project and, more generally, at the heart of Catholicism's engagement with the liberal culture of America. The issue lies embedded in the pope's call for a new evangelization of culture and for an authentic liberation of humanity.

Few would doubt that America's patterns of thought have been deeply affected by activism and extroversion, and its patterns of life by consumerism. The burden of my proposal is that, unless Catholics ensure that receptivity, with its implication of interiority and a priority of the contemplative, be given its anterior place in the constitution of being and acting, their own responses to the culture, for example, in terms of its morality and politics, will leave intact, indeed will themselves embody (however unwittingly), the very activism, extroversion, and disposition toward "having" and "possessing" that are the source of the problem.

How does an understanding of the human person (cf. Murray's emphasis) as one who first "possesses" his own act of existence, who is the autonomous source of his actions, whose relation to the other is engaged first through an outward-directed (communicative) *agere* help us to reverse these activist, extroverted, and consumeristic patterns of American culture? What revisions in the primitive meaning of "possession," "autonomous source," and *agere* are indicated by a different sense of the priority of receptive relation?

Clarke's stimulating and challenging book seeks to introduce into Thomism a more foundational place for relation and receptivity than is presupposed in the work of Murray. My question is nonetheless whether that place is yet foundational enough. Do we not need somehow to inscribe relation *from* the O(o)ther—hence receptivity—already within the human-creaturely *esse*, as the anterior condition of all human being-acting, both *in* itself and *toward* the O(o)ther?

This is hardly a niggling question. It lies at the intersection of Anglo-American liberalism, Thomism, and John Paul II's hermeneutic of the Second Vatican Council.

David L. Schindler

RESPONSE TO DAVID SCHINDLER'S COMMENTS

I am deeply grateful for these comments, both the appreciative, the critical, and the constructive ones. In a sense they are a model for what a truly fruitful philosophical or theological discussion should be, as I think the reader will soon see. In my answer I would like to do two things: (1) clear up certain misunderstandings of my thought, and in this sense to defend it; but more importantly, (2) to acknowledge the lacuna in my own thought which Prof. Schindler has very insightfully laid his finger on, to accept gratefully the new lines of development he has sketched out, and to begin to integrate them into a more complete metaphysical vision.

First as to the misunderstandings: Schindler is worried that, in rooting the relationality of the human person in action (*agere*), which is the "secondary act" of a being, rather than in the very act of existence (*esse*), I am not going deep enough but am stopping at the level of the accidental, the secondary (since action in creatures is an accident following upon existence, but is distinct from it and secondary to it). Hence he is concerned that I am not really justified in making the claim, as I certainly do, that relationality should be considered an equally primordial dimension of reality as substantiality itself. As a result, he believes I am holding that the *esse* of a created being grounds only its in-itself-ness, or substantiality, whereas action, by itself as an accident, grounds the relationality.

This is not at all my position. I hold that the relationality dimension

of any real being, its dynamic tendency toward self-communicative action, is rooted in the very substantial act of *esse* itself; it is "expansive" by its very nature as act of existence, not by something secondary or distinct from it. The secondary act, the concrete particular action, does not originate this dynamic tendency on its own; it is rather the expression of the self-communicating dynamism already in the grounding act of *esse* itself. But we still must distinguish in a creature its *actual relations* to other beings from its substantial *esse*, because any actualized real relation demands that the other end of the relation also be real, and such real relations in a contingent world to other contingent beings must be themselves contingent. If these real relations were identical with the substance, they would have to be always, immutably, and necessarily present wherever the substance itself were. But this cannot be true in a contingent, changing world. Only in God, as St. Thomas unambiguously teaches, can his actions be identical with his essence, not in any creature, even angels. Surely Prof. Schindler would not want to hold the opposite.

Thus the radical dynamic tendency toward relationality belongs to the substantial *esse* itself, which in this sense grounds both the in-itself of the creature and its relational dynamism; but the expression of this innate dynamism in actual particular relations is rooted in particular actions contingently posited with respect to other contingent beings. (The relation to God is an exception, as we shall see.) I think that part of the difficulty lies perhaps in too heavy a distinction between sub-