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A CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATION
OF METAPHYSICS IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY:
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
AND CLAUDE TRESMONTANT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College
and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Daniel Michael Strudwick

May 2008

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Daniel Michael Strudwick

2008

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OF METAPHYSICS IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY:
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By

Daniel Michael Strudwick

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ABSTRACT

A CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATION
OF METAPHYSICS IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY:
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
AND CLAUDE TRESMONTANT

By

Daniel Michael Strudwick

May 2008

Dissertation Supervised by William M, Thompson-Uberuaga, Ph.D.

It has been traditionally held that Catholic theology has notable metaphysical threads deeply connected with the fabric of its faith and its systematic presentation. This dissertation focuses upon those “metaphysical threads” in order to explore their past, present and possible future status within theology. In each section the goal is to investigate the contributions of John Paul II and Claude Tresmontant and the role they believe metaphysics has within Catholic Systematic theology.

This work attempts to present and assess whether, which, and why components of metaphysics, according to John Paul II and Tresmontant, should be retained even in light of modern philosophical challenges. Chapter Two highlights the thought of Claude Tresmontant. Tresmontant was convinced that there was a distinct “Christian Metaphysics.” He maintains that metaphysics is a necessary outgrowth of a thoughtful commitment to a Judeo-Christian biblical perspective. His metaphysical focus draws our

attention towards cosmological and anthropological considerations. Chapter Three explores the thought of Pope John Paul II who advocated metaphysics as a way to ground both the contributions of phenomenology and Christian ethics, as well as being a precondition for achieving rationally grounded thought. Since Pope John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* calls for metaphysics to be reinstated to its proper place within the Catholic intellectual tradition, this chapter investigates how John Paul II envisions integrating metaphysics within systematic Catholic thought. A thoughtful reflection upon these two thinkers seeks to provide a better understanding of at least some of what may be at stake by either maintaining, significantly revising, or abandoning the metaphysical tradition.

Chapter Four presents the postmodern challenge to a continued metaphysics within Christian philosophical theology. The arguments of both Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo seek to explicate the perspectives of thinkers of the postmodern philosophical tradition, arguing for the elimination of foundationalism in all its forms. Chapter Five places all four thinkers in dialogue and concludes with some propositions for future collaboration.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Amanda Renee, and son, Daniel Leonard, who each day give visible witness to the Beauty, Truth and Goodness of God. It is also dedicated to my parents, Daniel Joseph and Angela Strudwick, whose love and sacrifice provided my first glimpse at the face of Christ.

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First and foremost I would like to thank Dr. William Thompson-Uberuaga, who guided and encouraged this work through every stage. His enthusiasm for theological truth, coupled with his profound faith has given me a model which will guide me well for many years to come. His “charitable hermeneutic” has taught me to seek out the best in what each theologian or philosopher has to offer.

I would like to thank Gil Ring and Fr. Guy Mansini, O.S.B., for imparting to me a love and appreciation of metaphysics. I am also grateful to W. Norris Clarke, S.J. for encouraging this love, both while I was a student at Seton Hall, and later when he so graciously allowed me to visit him at Fordham.

I am grateful to my committee members for their willingness to participate in the dissertation process. I owe thanks to Dr. George Worgul, who has provided encouragement and suggestions while I was engaged in the writing process. I am also indebted to Dr. James Swindal, Chair of Philosophy, for generously agreeing to provide his philosophical expertise.

To my colleagues who provided help by way of editing and formatting, I am forever in your debt: Robert Vanderwaag, Patrick Doering, Fr. Michael Darcy and Marie Mulloney. Although the value of your contribution to this dissertation was great, the value of your friendship is ever greater.

I would like to thank the following people at Duquesne University who assisted me at various stages of my university work and made my time a true blessing: Marie

Baird, the late Michael Cahill, Anne Clifford, Michael Fagge, James P. Hanigan, Sean Kealy, C.S.S.P., Naos McCool, C.S.S.P., Maureen O'Brien and Roland Ramirez.

I am appreciative of the love and support I have received from the CORE group at St. Richard Catholic Church. You are truly among the most faith-filled and inspiring people the Lord has brought into my life. I am also grateful for the support I have received from the teens and parishioners of St. Richard.

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And finally, I am thankful to all of those (whether on earth or in heaven) whose intercessory prayers brought this work to its conclusion. *Ad Majorum Dei Glorium!*

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“A small mistake in the beginning is a large mistake in the end.”
-Aristotle *Work I a ii*.¹

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Section 1: Overview

Throughout the history of Christianity believers have engaged in philosophical undertakings in as much as they were pertinent to Christian self-understanding or apologetics. Some of this thought took place within the sphere of metaphysics. Although not all of Christianity’s early thinkers were in favor of becoming engaged in philosophy,² the bulk of these early theologians found it necessary to at least borrow the then current philosophical terminology to explain their unique position on a variety of topics.³ As Christians were drawn toward deeper understanding of their faith, and as they were also pressed to define their beliefs against various forms of heresies and misrepresentations, the precision found within Hellenistic thought afforded the early theologians an ability to express their faith in new and compelling ways.

It has been traditionally held that Catholic theology has notable metaphysical threads deeply connected with the fabric of its faith and its systematic presentation. A cursory reading of philosophy and theology from the patristic period until our own day,

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1978). This quote, used by St. Thomas at the beginning of his notable metaphysical work *On Being and Essence*, still stands as a reminder of the importance of foundational thought and its bearing upon all that we consequently achieve as we engage in theology. Regardless of whether one follows in the Aristotelian/Thomistic school or proposes a radical reworking of foundational or metaphysical thought, it would seem agreed upon by all that where and how we begin is of the utmost importance.

² Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1961) 33, 122. Here one finds reference to Tertullian’s famous question as to theology’s need of philosophy. ““What has Athens to do with Rome?” Cf. *De Praescriptionibus Haereticorum*.

³ Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 34-38. Justin, Origen and Clement of Alexandria are here posited as representatives of a marriage of Christian and Greek thought.

official church documents, as well as the writings of our most notable theologians, such as Justin, Anselm, Augustine and Aquinas, seem so tied to metaphysical influences that exploring this connection in a sustained manner seems a worthwhile endeavor.

This dissertation will focus upon those “metaphysical threads” in order to explore their past, present and possible future status within theology. In each section the goal is to investigate the contributions of John Paul II and Claude Tresmontant and the role they believe metaphysics has within Catholic Systematic theology. Arguably each has made highly significant contributions to the proposed focus of this dissertation.

A survey of the field of metaphysics illustrates that its scope has been broad indeed, and thus the concerns which can be aptly placed within the realm of metaphysics are not so easily delineated. Avery Dulles, in his classic text, co-authored by James M. Demske and Robert J. O’Connell, notes that there is no single way to divide metaphysical content.⁴ This text will at times help to serve our aim inasmuch as it provides one introduction to the study of metaphysics and presents a possible division of its content. The subtitle of the work reveals this division as ontology, cosmology and natural theology. Cosmological questions related to our topic include a consideration of various conceptions of the absolute, differing views of creation, along with belief or disbelief in eternal matter. Questions that fall under the umbrella of natural theology, including the role of metaphysics in understanding the divine attributes, are also relevant. And, of course, fundamental principles, or rules for engaging in any type of thought whatsoever, such as the principles of non contradiction and sufficient reason, also typically are featured in traditional metaphysics. The necessity of such rules has been traditionally held, because of the

⁴ Avery R. Dulles, James M. Demske, and Robert J. O’Connell, *Introductory Metaphysics: A Course Combining Matter Treated in Ontology, Cosmology, and Natural Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955) 3-5.

claim that without such rules human thought is rendered nonsensical. Naturally the question of “being” and the related issue of becoming have been dimensions of metaphysics since Aristotle. As can be seen, the range of possible issues is immense, and no dissertation could do them the full justice they deserve. Our aim is more modest, namely, to keep these concerns from the tradition of metaphysics in mind, and to explore their proposed interpretations and the role they play or do not play in the thought of John Paul II and Claude Tresmontant.

In light of modern challenges to the continued validity of accepting metaphysical presuppositions, I will attempt to present and assess whether, which, and why components of metaphysics, according to John Paul II and Tresmontant, should be retained even in light of modern philosophical challenges.⁵ Of course, no assessment of this kind would be complete without a consideration of the philosophical “turn to the subject” and its bearing upon contemporary Catholic thought.

The inspiration for this dissertation was in great part due to the late Pope John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio* (hereafter FR),⁶ and his call to reinstate the proper place of metaphysics within the Catholic intellectual tradition. This call for metaphysical retrieval implies two things. First it implies that metaphysics in our age has lost some intellectual ground and is in need of reinstating. Secondly, it implies that metaphysics has real value and is in fact worthy of retrieval. Since in the words of John Paul II “the church has no philosophy of its own,” I thought it worthwhile to investigate how John Paul II envisioned integrating metaphysics within systematic Catholic thought. Through this study we may find one way, or at least important components of a way, to acknowledge the

⁵ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System*, new expanded ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2000) 119-133.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, trans. Vatican Translation (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998).

benefits derived from philosophical advances such as the contributions provided by phenomenology and existentialism while not abandoning the intellectual achievements of the past. For the reasons just mentioned I have chosen John Paul II as one springboard for this project. He has contributed to both the philosophical and theological development of the Christian tradition. Much of his thought, admittedly, is still in need of serious reflection before its full merits can be honestly evaluated. He also may be looked towards as an example of a philosopher/theologian committed to faithful reception of the intellectual heritage of the past while remaining open to new ways of thinking as evidenced in his commitment to phenomenology.⁷

For other reasons I have chosen Claude Tresmontant. Tresmontant was convinced that there was a distinct “Christian Metaphysics.”⁸ His considerations from both a biblical and patristic perspective are worthy of serious reflection. The metaphysics of Tresmontant are more focused upon cosmology and anthropology, and as such will sharpen our attention in this direction while exploring his work. By a thoughtful reflection upon these two thinkers we might be able to gain a better understanding of at least some of what may be at stake by either maintaining, significantly revising, or abandoning the metaphysical tradition.

Although Pope John Paul II and Claude Tresmontant are the subjects of this consideration, the contributions of Cardinal Dulles⁹ and Father W. Norris Clarke¹⁰ have been

⁷ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999) 126-129.

⁸ Claude Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, trans. Gerard Slevin (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965).

⁹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003) 193-208.

¹⁰ W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being- God - Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); idem, "Metaphysics as Mediator Between Revelation and Natural Sciences," *Com-*

particularly helpful in elucidating aspects of the tradition of metaphysics represented by the Pope and Tresmontant. In the period directly before the Second Vatican Council, Dulles' co-authored text book in Metaphysics was the first encounter many young students had with metaphysical questions. Although after the Council Dulles was involved in a broad range of theological issues, most notably in the area of ecclesiology, his interest in fundamental theology did not wane. Recently in a speech given at the John Paul II Phenomenology Conference at Duquesne University,¹¹ he asserted that a return to a solid metaphysical grounding is essential for proper Catholic philosophical and theological thought to continue. Father Clarke has been a proponent of metaphysical studies for nearly three quarters of a century. He has encountered the many philosophical challenges posed to philosophers and theologians over these many years and has responded to them by seeking out the very best that each has had to offer and has nonetheless championed the continued study of a Thomistically inspired metaphysics.

I will also draw significantly from the work of Thomas Guarino. Father Guarino has been involved extensively in foundational thinking within theology for many years and displays a broad knowledge of how many of its controversies have played out. His work, *Foundations in Systematic Thought*, gives considerable evidence that he has closely followed classical as well as postmodern thought.¹² For this reason, I will also explore his consideration of *Fides et Ratio* and the academic responses, both positive and negative, to which it gave rise.

munio XXVIII.3 (Fall 2001): 464-87; idem, W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001).

¹¹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," paper presented at the Proceedings of the Second Annual Fall Conference of the Simon Silverman Center- "The Phenomenology of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II," December 1-2 Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, 2006.

¹² Thomas Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005).

My intention in writing this dissertation, then, is to draw attention to questions such as the following in light of the various authors treated: Do they make the case that there are in fact central metaphysical components attached to or inherent in Catholic systematic theology? If so, how do they do so? If there are, do they more specifically tell us what these are? In light of modern philosophy, how do they argue that the metaphysical project remains possible? More specifically yet, do they argue that Christianity in fact possesses a unique metaphysics? Do they employ and acknowledge foundational rules of thought, for example, the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason? Do they offer reasons to support one particular kind of metaphysics, for example, the Thomist or some other? How do they explain the nature of the relationship between magisterial teaching and metaphysics? And more broadly yet, how do they view the role of the Greco-Roman heritage vis-à-vis Roman Catholic theology?

I also hope to widen the range of my conversation partners in a controlled way, of course, by bringing the thought of the Pope and Tresmontant into dialogue with some others whose view of metaphysics is more negative. This is to be done not in an adversarial or co-opting spirit, but in a genuine desire to deepen my own capacity for self-criticism, as well as to better facilitate my own ability to evaluate the thought of the Pope and Tresmontant.

Section 2: Methodology

I will first explore what has been traditionally thought of as subject matter falling within metaphysical study. Beginning with Aristotle,¹³ who himself was the recipient of a rich metaphysical tradition, I will lay out some of the basic questions that produced fruit-

¹³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1978).

ful results by way of metaphysical inquiry. The focus will be placed on central questions asked by metaphysics so as not to become sidetracked by the innumerable debates that rage at the periphery. These issues, though important in themselves, could keep us from seeing the core. The thought of St. Thomas Aquinas¹⁴ will play a central role. Although it is abundantly clear that not all of our metaphysical heritage originates in Thomas, it might be argued that the synthesis of metaphysical thought he provided is singularly important for an understanding of the Catholic reception of metaphysics and its influence upon John Paul II and Tresmontant. When appropriate, I hope to present how the writings of Thomas have often synthesized the Christian thinkers that preceded him. His thought, then, is something of a compendium of the Catholic reception of the metaphysical tradition.

We will move, then, to a consideration of the contribution of Tresmontant. It was his conviction that there is a distinct Judeo-Christian set of metaphysical views that are so essential to our thought that it would be impossible to think apart from them and retain a consistent Christian position in continuity with an Apostolic faith.¹⁵ His work also leads us to consider the deep roots of particular metaphysical starting points which derived from our Jewish heritage long before being affected by any Greek influence.¹⁶ At the same time, I will explore whether and how, according to Tresmontant, the Christian reception of metaphysics resulted in something of a reworking and/or revision of the Hellenistic metaphysical tradition, as Greek thought was brought into contact with Hebraic,

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1950), and *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Complete English edition in five volumes (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948).

¹⁵ Claude Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, trans. Gerard Slevin (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), and *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, trans. Mark Pontifex, Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Philosophy 11, ed. Henri Daniel-Rops (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963).

¹⁶ Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, trans. Michael Francis Gibson (New York: Desclée de Brouwer Company, 1960).

historical thought. In this regard, for example, Walter Kasper appeals to the work of Tresmontant in a Christian refashioning of metaphysics. Holding that the “biblical understanding of reality properly needs an ontological interpretation,” still the biblical inheritance would offer a “basis for an historical understanding of reality which sees being as process, without however reducing everything to a relativizing coming-to-be.”¹⁷

I will then explore the case that *Fides et Ratio*, in combination with other works by Pope John Paul II, makes for the metaphysical dimensions of Christian revelation and theology. Tresmontant and John Paul II would seem to offer complementary but not identical approaches to our central concerns, but investigating this further will be one of this dissertation’s major goals.

Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo will be our central representatives of thinkers who bring substantive but not identical challenges to metaphysical projects. It is not possible to survey the entire range of such thinkers, but it is hoped that these two represent significant thinkers whose views can at least aid us in our goal of exploring metaphysics’ potential theological role in as critical a manner as possible. I hope to place these two religiophilosophical thinkers in dialogue with the challenges of *Fides et Ratio* and the biblically founded work of Tresmontant. Hopefully this will result in a mutually fruitful exchange.

Section 3: Content

This dissertation will contain five chapters. Chapter one, the introduction, will contain an overture to the questions to be addressed. Much of what is contained in this proposal will be laid out in further detail and treated with greater precision. This chapter

¹⁷ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, trans. V. Green (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 192 n.2.

will also set the parameters of the dissertation. I will attend to the issue of why the question of the role of metaphysics is now being raised anew, requiring a reflection on the current philosophical context. Finally, I will explain my choice of Pope John Paul II and Tresmontant as springboards for this discussion.

Chapter two will focus upon those writings of Tresmontant that pertain to the proposed metaphysical foundations rooted within Judeo-Christian history. His concentration upon Judeo-Christian thought from its Hebrew origin up to and through the early Church Fathers is helpful for tracing the origins of the Christian reception of metaphysics. His contention that there is a specific biblically based Christian metaphysics will be particularly studied. My focus will be upon the unique contribution of Tresmontant, especially in regards to his metaphysical concentration in the areas of cosmology and anthropology. Tresmontant will then lead us into a study of various long held church doctrines which, as his work suggests, intersect with such metaphysical notions as the absolute, creation, evil, time, the body/soul problem and cognition, along with some others.

More specifically, the Tresmontant section will unfold in the following order. It will begin with the re-exploration of the question of whether a Christian metaphysics can in fact exist. An overview of the development of the debate will be provided. Tresmontant's contention that there is a Biblical metaphysics will then be elaborated upon in some detail. This will be followed by the first set of themes explored by Tresmontant, namely, those which fall under the metaphysical umbrella of "cosmology." I will then present the thought of Tresmontant as he investigates each of the following: the Absolute, Creation, Matter, Evil and Time. The unique methodology of Tresmontant will also be contained within this first set of topics. The second set of topics is more anthropological in orienta-

tion. These include: Tresmontant's overall view of Anthropology, the Soul, Human Nature, Cognition-Christian Reason, the Pneuma, the Heart and the Supernatural Destiny of the Human Person. All of this will then conclude with an evaluation of the contribution of Tresmontant.

Chapter three will begin with an overview of the philosophical background of Pope John Paul II. Special attention will be paid to *Fides et Ratio* as it relates to metaphysics. We will consider what John Paul II meant by a retrieval of metaphysics and what he might consider vital as related to this end. Other pertinent works by the late pontiff will then be reviewed.¹⁸ Since John Paul II was influenced by both Thomism and Phenomenology, how the two strains of thought relate to his metaphysical position will also be treated. We will conclude this chapter with a summary of the reception of his works thus far, with special attention upon the reception of *Fides et Ratio*.

The chapter begins with a short biography of the Pope and what influences may have contributed towards his propensity for both metaphysical realism and phenomenology. Pertinent sections of *Fides et Ratio* will then be explored. This lengthy exploration will allow for a fuller vision of the Pope's view of the importance of metaphysics. The subsequent section will concern the affect of the thought of Kant upon John Paul's philosophy. I will then move towards an investigation of his commitment to Phenomenology and Personalism. The other writings of the Pontiff will subsequently be examined with a mind to how they reflect his position regarding metaphysics. The chapter ends with an evaluation and conclusion.

¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee, ed. Vittorio Messori (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); idem, *Fides et Ratio*; Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979); idem, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (New York: Farrar - Straus - Giroux, 1981); idem, *The Jeweler's Shop*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

Chapter four will then seek to address the concerns of those religiophilosophical thinkers who bring substantive challenges to the metaphysical project. As noted, the concerns of Vattimo and Marion will serve as our representative concerns in this regard. Both of these thinkers seek to lead theology in a new direction, and we will investigate how they recommend we should proceed. As this dissertation is unable to give full voice to either Vattimo or Marion, I will focus primarily upon one work from each as it pertains to the question of metaphysical essentials. For Vattimo we will primarily utilize *After Christianity*,¹⁹ and for Marion we will mainly employ *God Without Being*.²⁰ Arguably these are central and substantive works, although they will need to be supplemented by a regard for other writings by these authors, as well as by the writings of their major commentators.

The larger part of this chapter will be devoted to Marion and his ongoing contributions in the areas of philosophy and theology. Within this section I will lay out the larger postmodern commitments to which both Marion and Vattimo ascribe. I will open this section by providing a brief biography of Marion. I will then list some of the challenges one finds when first approaching his writings. I will then present Marion's goal of eliminating metaphysics, along with his reasoning for having such an aim. Several of the more influential thinkers whom he has encountered—and either integrated or rejected—will be presented. Specifically, these include Kant, Heidegger, Nietzsche and Aquinas. I will then explore several of the significant theological themes developed by Marion. This first section of the chapter will conclude with a reflection on the positive contributions he offers, as well as some of the challenges that his work faces. The second section will pro-

¹⁹ Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

²⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, *Religion and Postmodernism*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

vide a brief biography of Vattimo followed by five considerations by Vattimo on a variety of topics. They include: postmodern thought, metaphysics, “weak thought,” Nietzsche and biblical understanding. The chapter will then conclude with brief remarks.

Chapter five will then seek to assess the preceding chapters. Here I will attempt to address the questions asked in the first chapter in light of the many voices encountered in chapters two, three and four. It is in this chapter that I intend to provide an assessment of the contemporary role of metaphysics as seen by John Paul II and Tresmontant in light of placing them in dialogue with one another and with Vattimo and Marion. I also suggest that a focused investigation of the place of metaphysics might offer some future direction for Christian scholarship. It is admitted that much of this subject matter, most especially when Thomistically focused, tends to be of more interest to Catholic philosophers and theologians. However, I would also like, in small part, to attend to some of the ecumenical ramifications, and will do so as they come up within the dissertation.²¹ This is important, since Reformed and Orthodox Christians dwell within the same philosophical milieu, and an elaboration upon the role of metaphysics may also prove useful for these Christians as well. This will be most true as concerns biblically-based positions deriving from our common Judeo-Christian heritage. Other parts of this dissertation will be more pertinent to Catholic theology, especially in our consideration of metaphysical language as found in official Church teaching.

²¹ Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003). Geisler is an Evangelical Protestant who advocates the use of the philosophy of St. Thomas. It is his conviction that much of Thomas’ philosophy can help Christians of all denominations to avoid serious foundational mistakes, and thereby remain solid as they engage in theology.

Section 4: Elaboration on the Sphere of Metaphysics

When setting out to discuss the role of metaphysics within the work of Tresmontant and John Paul II one is first obliged to define in a more restricted sense what, for the sake of understanding their work, will be meant by metaphysics. Often in common parlance the word metaphysics is used to refer to all spiritual realities whatsoever. In this dissertation the term will be more narrowly used. Although there is no single definition for metaphysics, by drawing from a few notable scholars we can arrive at a more refined notion of the term. Cardinal Dulles states that “by metaphysics we understand the philosophical study of the real- that is, of that which exists independently of the act by which we know it.”²² Norris Clarke gives the following explanation of the science.

Metaphysics fits into the overall project of philosophy as its innermost ground, as that part which focuses its inquiry explicitly on the *vision of the whole*, that is, what is common to all real beings and what constitutes their connectedness to the universe as a meaningful whole. It is the ultimate framework or horizon of inquiry, into which all other investigations, including all the sciences, fit as partial perspectives. Its work will then be to try to discern the great universal properties, constitutive principles, and governing laws of all that is real, in a word, the laws of intelligibility of *being as such*, including how all beings interrelate to form an intelligible whole, that is, a *universe*... This is the meaning of the ancient classical definition of metaphysics descending from Aristotle- the first to explicitly define metaphysics- namely, “Metaphysics is the study of *being qua being*” or being as such.²³

Br. Benignus calls metaphysics a “master-science” as it does not just study parts or pieces of reality, but is the science which studies all being. He asserts that its creden-

²² Avery R. Dulles, James M. Damske, and Robert J. O'Connell, *Introductory Metaphysics: A Course Combining Matter Treated in Ontology, Cosmology, and Natural Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955) 4.

²³ W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001) 5-6.

tials as a science have been thought sufficiently established as it possesses a proper object, "being as such." He notes that "this object not only is studied by no other science, but it underlies the object of every other science."²⁴

For the purposes for this dissertation we will use the following slightly modified definitions for the various branches of metaphysical study offered in Dulles' text.

Ontology = the study of reality in its most general aspects. It is in the study of ontology that one attempts to answer questions such as these: What is being? What are the general types of beings? How can there be many beings? What is required in order for there to be change? This is also referred to as General Metaphysics.

Natural Theology = the study of God: His existence, nature and operations. Included in this study is what is referred to as the divine attributes.

Metaphysical Anthropology = the study of living bodies considered precisely with respect to their vital operations. This was in the past also referred to as rational psychology.

Cosmology = the study of the common aspects of the visible universe, with special attention to non-living bodies.²⁵

The two foundational principles that we will be referring to throughout this dissertation are the Principle of non-Contradiction and the Principle of Sufficient Reason. We will rely on the broader view of these principles as held by Clarke rather than a narrower rationalistic perspective such as that of Leibniz on Sufficient Reason. Clarke defines these principles as follows:

Principle of Non-Contradiction = This principle, often called simply the "principle of contradiction," lays down the basic law of intelligibility governing all being whatsoever and all discourse about anything whatsoever. Its classic formulation, coming down to us from Aristotle as probably its first explicit defender, is: "Nothing (i.e., no real being) can both be and not be at the same time and under the same aspect." The principle also holds for all meaningful language: "No proposition can both be asserted and de-

²⁴ Brother Benignus, *Nature Knowledge and God: An Introduction to Thomistic Philosophy* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1947) 357.

²⁵ Dulles, *Introductory Metaphysics*, 4-5.

nied at the same time and under the same aspect," under pain of becoming meaningless, although one can, of course, say the words.²⁶

Principle of Sufficient Reason = "Every being has the *sufficient reason* for its existence (i.e., the adequate ground or basis in existence for its intelligibility) either in itself or in another." Just as the Principle of Non-Contradiction is the static first principle of all being and thought, so the Principle of Sufficient Reason is the *dynamic* one, enabling the mind to pass from one being to another in the search to make sense out of it, to preserve it from falling into unintelligibility. All advance in thought to infer the existence of some new being from what we already know depends on this principle. The ancient and medieval thinkers, including St. Thomas, did not formulate the principle in these explicit terms, but simply included it under the general affirmation of the intelligibility of being (being as "true"), or formulated it more precisely for particular kinds of inference, e.g., "Every being that begins to exist (or is finite, or participated, or changing, etc.) requires a cause." But many modern Thomists welcome the explicit formulation given above, as I do, because of its convenience as the most all-inclusive expression of the dynamic intelligibility of being and distinct from the static principle, and one that all realistic metaphysicians used constantly, whether they describe it in this way or not. Yet many still refuse, like Gilson, the great historian of Thomism, for fear it will be confused with the rationalistic interpretation of it by Leibniz.²⁷

These few terms will begin to provide a framework out of which we can work, allowing us to refer to specific metaphysical content. Other terms and explanations will be provided within the body of each chapter as needed. These initial definitions are purposely broad in order to encompass the way in which they are employed by the numerous thinkers who will present their views on metaphysics throughout the subsequent chapters.

²⁶ Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 19.

²⁷ Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 20.

As for Thomism, its philosophy of nature has needed reshaping for a long time. The task (a vanished dream of my youth) is certainly not impossible, but it is difficult in the highest degree. Yet I am confident it will be done. It would require a team in which scientists and philosophers would work together, and which would be led by a competent philosopher. Such a philosopher seems to be improbable? I don't think so, his name is on the tip of my tongue.¹

-Jacques Maritain

CHAPTER TWO: TRESMONTANT AND METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS

The quotation by Jacques Maritain leads to a footnote naming Claude Tresmontant as the philosopher he thinks capable of such a feat. Although Maritain refers to a very specific philosophical undertaking, he nonetheless indicates his confidence in the intellectual ability of Tresmontant. With similar confidence, this chapter will explore the thought of Tresmontant, in particular his work in metaphysics.

Claude Tresmontant was born in Paris in 1925. He taught both medieval philosophy and philosophy of science at the Sorbonne, in Paris. He was awarded the *Prix Maximilien-Kolbe* in 1973 and the *Grand Prix de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques* in 1987 for his complete works. Tresmontant spent a lifetime studying the interrelationship between scripture and metaphysics. He died in 1997.

When confronting Tresmontant's work, it becomes apparent that he concerns himself most with the foundations that underpin Judeo-Christian thought. Although each of his works is distinct, one finds the author approaching the same subject matter with varied concentrations. It is as if he were scaling the same mountain, but always from a different angle and employing a different path. This continuous effort helps him to con-

¹ Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself About the Present Time*, trans. Michael Cuddihy and Elizabeth Hughes, 1966 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).

struct a consistent and nuanced metaphysics. His work clearly displays the unique place occupied by a Christian metaphysics. He asserts that logic itself demands that the Christian take seriously the place of revelation. This is because Sacred Scripture posits certain givens or points of departure. The Christian philosopher is able to construct a consistent philosophy in light of this revelation. Applying logic to axiomatic principles that the Christian takes as “given” might be a worthwhile venture, but some question the integrity of accepting any “givens.” To respond to this concern, Tresmontant seeks to expose the foundational presuppositions of all philosophical systems. He believes all philosophical systems adopt certain presuppositions from their beginnings. These presuppositions powerfully affect all subsequent developments of that system. When given a fair hearing, the Judeo-Christian metaphysical foundation proves superior to all competitors. In addition, he believes that pure reason, based in experience, will lead one to this conclusion, and that the findings of modern science additionally lend support to this claim.

Section 1: The Existence of Christian Metaphysics

Claude Tresmontant was in his early childhood when fierce debates raged over whether there could be a “Christian metaphysics.” Later when he entered the dispute, he held the conviction that there was a distinct Christian metaphysics. Indeed, he spent a lifetime of scholarship defending various aspects of this conviction.

Avery Cardinal Dulles provides an overview of the debate concerning the possibility of a distinctively Christian metaphysics.² We shall briefly recap his major points in order to grasp the pertinent issues confronted by Tresmontant and recognize how the dif-

² Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Can Philosophy Be Christian? The New State of the Question," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 3-21.

fering camps approached the problem and how they proposed a solution. Dulles' essay places in context the work and conviction of Tresmontant and also provides insight into a new state of the question which can be subsequently taken up with the following chapter on the contribution of John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*.³

The framing of the debate took shape with the help of Émile Bréhier, who denied the possibility of Christian Metaphysics.⁴ He argued that since there cannot be a Christian Mathematics or Christian Biology, there cannot be a Christian Philosophy. Philosophy, like mathematics and biology, is accessible to all through the human capacity to reason. Étienne Gilson, on the other hand, maintained that although philosophy and theology were distinct undertakings, theology provided philosophy with support. Gilson was convinced that theology could aid philosophical progress without damaging the integrity of philosophy.

Dulles concludes his overview with a brief excursus into a third group of mediating positions. Members of this group emphasize the interconnected relationship between philosophy and theology and how they can be mutually beneficial to one another. Dulles mentions that Maurice Blondel was quick to point out how this debate was framed to make revelation appear superfluous. Dulles notes:

as an alternative to this extrinsicism Blondel contended that philosophy, when it operates without any reference to faith, becomes aware of its own limits. It can discover within the human person an inner dynamism toward a goal that nature cannot reach and toward a truth that reason cannot discover.⁵

³ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, trans. Vatican Translation (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998).

⁴ For another recounting of the same debate see Benedetto D'amore, "La Filosofia Cristiana, Oggi," *Sapienza* 31 (1978): 275-278.

⁵ Dulles, *Can Philosophy Be Christian?* 9.

Maurice Blondel's writings had a great impact on Tresmontant. I will draw from his work on Blondel's metaphysics to explain a number of his philosophical positions.⁶ Tresmontant worked at a time when he was able to benefit from the theological and philosophical controversies that immediately preceded him. The creative work of these scholars sought to reconcile many of the philosophical issues raised anew by the contributions and challenges of modern philosophy.

Section 2: A Biblical Metaphysics

In order to make sense of Tresmontant's work, I will discuss his approach to the relationship between biblical revelation and metaphysics. Unlike most philosophers who shy away from biblical influences contained within their philosophy, Tresmontant firmly asserts the opposite. He was convinced that there is a "Biblical Metaphysics." In his 1960 article in *Cross Currents*, he writes:

This article intends to demonstrate that biblical thought possesses a structure which can only be called metaphysical because no other term would be appropriate; that a metaphysical structure of Biblical theology exists, not extrinsically or accidentally, but, as analysis will reveal, of intrinsic necessity. Biblical theology would not be possible, nor the biblical message of revelation exist, if it were not metaphysically structured. The very existence of this theology, of this revelation, implies a certain metaphysical structure as a prerequisite.⁷

Again, in his *Christian Metaphysics*, he reiterates the same point. This became his mantra throughout his academic career. He states:

I maintain that Christian theology and Christian dogma contain in themselves a metaphysical substructure, a body of very precise and very well-defined theses which are properly metaphysical, though it is only progres-

⁶ Claude Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963).

⁷ Claude Tresmontant, "Biblical Metaphysics," *Cross Currents* 10.3 (1960): 229.

sively with time, in the course of its history, that Christian thought becomes conscious of it.⁸

This probably strikes the reader as odd. Indeed, most philosophers today seek to establish the credibility of their work solely using reason and without divine revelation.

To make sense of the above assertions, it is necessary to understand Tresmontant's approach to metaphysics. He does not begin his work as a metaphysician dissatisfied with proposed metaphysical systems of the past and in search of a satisfactory metaphysical alternative. He instead finds that as a student of biblical theology there is in fact a coherent structure already in place. This structure contains an internal coherence and is unique. It is also clear upon a fleshing out of the structure that it stands in contradiction to other well-established metaphysical structures. Tresmontant then investigates the foundations of these competing systems (Platonism, the varied forms of Pantheism, Hegelianism, etc.) to see if the Judeo-Christian is weaker. He concludes that the opposite is the case, each system begins with some mythical assumptions, and the Judeo-Christian myth is rationally the most plausible.

In order to make more explicit what Tresmontant means by a Christian metaphysics, Edmond La B. Cherbonnier distinguishes between what we mean when we consider metaphysics in its general and specific forms. In his article, which deals specifically with the topic of a biblical metaphysics and the thought of Tresmontant, he makes some helpful distinctions.⁹ Metaphysics in its *general form* is comparable to the general study of physics. Those who are engaged in this general pursuit seek to understand the varied aspects of physical reality. The *more specific use* refers to the proposed system employed

⁸ Claude Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, trans. Gerard Slevin (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 20.

⁹ Edmond La B. Cherbonnier, "Is There a Biblical Metaphysic?" *Theology Today* XV.No. 4 (1959): 454.

by a given thinker. For example, we can compare Aristotelian, Newtonian and quantum physics. Each proposes a system that seeks to offer the greatest explanation of the workings of the same physical universe. It should be noted that each system is limited and cannot offer all the answers being asked of it. Yet, the system that provides the best answers with greatest accuracy will be considered the most “true.” Reality itself stands as judge. In this case, it is physical reality, and in metaphysics all reality.

Cherbonnier writes the following to clarify Tresmontant’s understanding of biblical metaphysics:

Metaphysics, likewise, in its general sense, refers to a particular inquiry. The metaphysician asks: “What is true always and everywhere, regardless of time or place? And how is this truth related to the particular truths of [times] and places?” Possible answers, from the atomic theory of Democritus to the idealism of Hegel, are also “metaphysics,” in the specific sense. When this sense is intended, the word is often spelled “metaphysic,” without the final s. The Biblical metaphysic is simply the systematic development of one possible answer to the metaphysician’s question, based upon hints and latent assumptions within the Bible.¹⁰

Tresmontant admits that a systematic biblical metaphysics does not exist within Scripture. It “must be disengaged by analysis, bringing it from its natural mode of existence to the level of conceptual formulation, as in a traditional ‘treatise’ of western philosophy.”¹¹ A systematic treatise, like the one previously mentioned by Tresmontant, requires a person to draw from the texts those cosmological elements that sit at the core of Hebrew thought. It includes the added difficulty of dealing with a people and language that are very concrete and lack the more abstract vocabulary offered by Greek thought.

¹⁰ Cherbonnier, “A Biblical Metaphysic?,” 454.

¹¹ Tresmontant, *Biblical Metaphysics*, 229.

The work of Tresmontant sets out to extract these elements. His effort leads me to consider the Judeo-Christian view of the following topics: the absolute, creation, matter, evil, time, time and eternity, body and soul relations, human nature, the supernatural destiny of human beings, the heart, the mind, faith and the renewal of intellect. Each of these concepts displays a distinct metaphysic that can bear no other title than Christian.

Even though a Jewish philosopher could adopt much of the metaphysics spoken of by Tresmontant, biblical metaphysics in its entirety includes the New Testament, which is not identical with Jewish thought. As we deal with each specific element, we can see how they both differ and agree. To be precise, Tresmontant's concern is with a distinctly Christian metaphysics, which is rooted in Judaism.

In describing the relationship between biblical metaphysics and Christian philosophy, Tresmontant says:

Christian philosophy *is* biblical metaphysics, developed in a different cultural context and philosophical milieu than that of Israel. The language and technical formulation may be different, but the structure remains essentially the same because it expresses what Blondel has called the philosophical exigencies of Christianity.¹²

Tresmontant says this biblical metaphysics gives expression to "the Real." The Hebrew people concretely lived out of the real, and the Real has a metaphysical structure. To make his case, Tresmontant contrasts the worldviews of the Hebrews with those of the Canaanites, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians. These worldviews, especially as they pertained to the Absolute, were in direct contrast to the Hebrews.

As put forth concisely in his article on biblical metaphysics, his thesis on this topic consists of two points: first, that "not every metaphysics is compatible with every

¹² Tresmontant, *Biblical Metaphysics*, 232.

theology,” and second, that “not every metaphysics, and thus not every theology, is compatible with any conception of the Real, with any cosmology, with any anthropology whatsoever.”¹³

Cherbonnier finds that Tresmontant’s focus on the concrete approach to metaphysical realism also aids in answering some of the difficulties found in religious language. He writes that “the problem of specifically ‘religious’ language, currently receiving such solicitous attention, disappears within the Biblical metaphysics. In Platonism, the language of the everyday world, since it is characterized by the ‘subject-object structure,’ cannot apply to the ‘divine.’ At best, it can be used only suggestively, to stir up in the hearer a hint of what can never be said but only intuitively felt. Within such a metaphysic, one is bound to conclude that ‘religion is the poetry men live by.’ One is saddled with the insoluble problem of which poetry is ‘more true.’”¹⁴

Cherbonnier finds the following quotation by Tresmontant representative of the universal approachability of Hebrew metaphysics:

The advantage of the Hebrew method of metaphysical communication... consists in its being universally comprehensible. [It] takes departure from what is most concrete and common, from the universally human. It is not allied with any particular culture; with all the contingencies which accompany it, nor with a particular system of abstractions generally reserved for a privileged class....The Biblical parable is equally intelligible to the Galilean peasant, to the Corinthian docker at the time of St. Paul, and to the contemporary worker in the factories of Paris. One must add, especially to them. The sense of the meaningfulness of manual labor, the love of the concrete, which characterize the parables, are looked upon as a deficiency by the Platonic mentality.¹⁵

¹³ Tresmontant, *Biblical Metaphysics*, 231.

¹⁴ Cherbonnier, "A Biblical Metaphysic?," 463.

¹⁵ Cherbonnier, *A Biblical Metaphysic?*, 463-64. The quote provided was Cherbonnier’s translation from the original French of Tresmontant’s *Essai sur la Pensée Hébraïque* (Paris Éditions du Cerf, 1953), 66-67.

It is Tresmontant's love of the particular that at times puts him at odds with Platonic thought and its fascination with the universal. While for Plato the universal was to be sought in attempting to attain the more real, for Tresmontant it is in the particular that the depths of reality are to be found. This love of the particular proves to fit well within Christian theology which inevitably must admit revelation's manifestation in the particular. Biblical revelation takes place at a particular time, to a particular person(s), in a particular language etc. There is an ironic sense in which the particular becomes the very springboard for the possibility of a universal relevance. As Brian Cudahy states, "it could be said the Tresmontant characterizes Hebrew thought as materialistic, existential, and deeply conscious of the irreducibility of the historical and temporal dimension."¹⁶

Before a sustained exploration of specific contributions made by Tresmontant in regard to specific metaphysical topics, a few preliminary comments are in order. First, some may be concerned with Tresmontant's use of Scripture and his apparent choice not to include extensive modern biblical exegesis as he treats some key passages related to his metaphysical conclusions. For better or worse, Tresmontant does not often fill his texts with heavy exegetical footnotes. He does, however, provide an in-depth exploration of scripture in his works where this is in fact the focus. Fortunately, his interpretation and explanation of the texts were not outside of the parameters of the mainstream thought of his time. Perhaps, in light of his work, some future scholarship could attempt a more critical look at the scriptural passages used by Tresmontant to see how they fare after un-

¹⁶ Brian Cudahy, "Claude Tresmontant and Biblical Metaphysics," paper presented at the Proceedings for the Year of 1967 (Boston College: The American Philosophical Association, 1967) 225.

dergoing critical exegesis in light of modern scholarship.¹⁷ It seems that the author is more set upon staying on task concerning his philosophical project as opposed to turning his efforts into an exercise in exegetical debate. By his own admission, Tresmontant used and conceded to the best scholarship available during the time he wrote each of his works, most especially the earlier works. It should also be noted that Tresmontant himself authored works in the field of biblical theology, particularly later in his career.¹⁸ His continued study seems to have led him to engage in different debates in the area of biblical theology, but did not result in his recanting on points of biblical interpretation, as far as I have been able to survey.

Secondly, the work of Tresmontant is only foundational in a sketchy sense, thus calling for further critique. In the *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Cudahy states:

¹⁷ It is also worthy of note that Tresmontant himself is often critical of the critics as pertains to biblical scholarship and exegesis. Part of his very thesis is that philosophical predispositions underlie much of what is the result of a particular approach to exegesis. The following quote is taken from the epilogue of *The Hebrew Christ*. He illustrates this point by noting some of the philosophical assumptions that go into a late dating of the fourth Gospel. He notes that "philosophical assumptions, like philosophical preferences and dislikes, have also always played a considerable role in the great scientific debates and controversies of the past. In the history of biblical scholarship and exegesis, it is evident that such philosophical assumptions adopted prior to any objective exegesis have played an equally considerable role. Ernest Renan openly declared this to be the case in the famous preface to the thirteenth edition of his *Life of Jesus*. Some of the most illustrious biblical scholars have similarly declared openly their opinion that Christianity was pure mythology and the Gospels nothing but collections of stories and legends. Since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, there has existed a strong presumption or tendency to view the composition of the Gospels in the light of such presuppositions as these, presuppositions adopted in advance of any actual scholarly research. With regard to the fourth Gospel, it has been dated as late as A.D.170 on the presupposition that it had to be later than the others, since it was more theological and speculative and they were, and since it seemed to be permeated by influences coming from Greek philosophy; this was evident from the first line, scholars declared, since it began by speaking of the *logos*...other attitudes played their roles; other certitudes dictated conclusions supposedly based on objective scholarship. These attitudes and certitudes included the proposition that the supernatural did not exist. If therefore any text *seemed* to prophecy a future conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, this text must necessarily have been written *after* the events it pretended to foretell." Claude Tresmontant, *The Hebrew Christ*, trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 320-321.

¹⁸ Claude Tresmontant, *The Hebrew Christ*, trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 319.

his work is by no means a complete and adequate philosophical statement. At best it is a mere sketch of certain key lines that a philosophical system might take. In the works we have discussed there is no rigorous analysis of being and knowledge and God, simply a series of vignettes that point toward such an analysis.¹⁹

In several footnotes, Cudahy acknowledges that Tresmontant admitted this in his *A Study of Hebrew Thought*. In the introduction, Tresmontant says his work is a “sketch” and a “blueprint.” On the whole, Cudahy presents an optimistic view of Tresmontant’s work. Conceding that there are inevitably points which could have been more well defined or even possibly omitted, it is worthy of note that these sketches were subsequently filled out and built upon. After its publication, Tresmontant wrote for thirty more years without making any substantial changes to his general thesis.

In his forward to *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, John M. Oesterreicher shares some of the same concerns, and yet pays considerable tribute to this author. He underscores that his critical remarks concerning the work of Tresmontant should not be understood as overshadowing his great admiration for his contribution. He writes:

I hope that the expression of a few disagreements, rather than sweeping praise, will convince the reader of my genuine admiration for Tresmontant’s work. In a few instances, his language is not as precise as I should wish it to be, but to dwell on one or the other inexact word would be ungrateful. His book is that of a pioneer— he himself calls it an *essai*—and as such it is a remarkable achievement. Its greatest merit, it seems to me, is to have given us a fresh perspective of the biblical teaching on creation.²⁰

I agree with Oesterreicher that Tresmontant’s contribution in the area of creation stands out as exemplary. Besides his distinctive treatment of metaphysical content, his unique approach to metaphysics is also worthy of mention. Walter J. Ong, S.J. explains

¹⁹ Cudahy, *Claude Tresmontant and Biblical Metaphysics*, 228.

²⁰ Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, trans. Michael Francis Gibson (New York: Desclée de Brouwer Company, 1960), xiv.

the original contribution of Tresmontant in his introduction to *Christian Metaphysics*. He highlights how each subject that Tresmontant works to present consistently meets three criteria.

First, each theme presented by Tresmontant is a reflection of what the Church teaches directly or by implication. Tresmontant makes no claim to originality in content. Rather, he seeks to elaborate the rich content already contained within the Church. Second, the subject matter is truly metaphysical and therefore accessible through philosophy. Although faith sources helped to discover the metaphysical truth, it is now accessible to all. Third, it is unique as a systematic whole. No other group adheres to this system, and this is not only true of the entire system, but several of its key parts.²¹

I will consider each of the areas of metaphysics as presented by Tresmontant. Although Tresmontant makes his greatest contribution in the area of creation theology, it is appropriate to begin with his treatment of the absolute. I will use his *Christian Metaphysics* to analyze this topic. Even though *Christian Metaphysics* is not Tresmontant's final work, it is arguably his most distilled and synthesized. In addition to several topics outlined by Tresmontant, I will introduce some others that he discussed.

Section 3: The Absolute

Tresmontant begins his treatment of the absolute by comparing it to Brahmanism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Neoplatonism, Spinozism and German idealism. It is in contrast to these cosmologies that he explores the unique metaphysical view posited by Christians. He says:

²¹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 8.

According to Christianity the absolute is not the world, or—what comes to the same thing—the world is not the absolute. The world is not uncreated, eternal, ontologically sufficient. Neither is the world something of the absolute; it is not a shadow of the absolute, nor an emanation, nor a modality of the divine substance. Rather, the world is radically, ontologically other than the absolute. It is neither of divine essence nor of divine nature. Nature is not absolute mind alienated, petrified, or exiled....According to Christianity the absolute is unique.²²

Tresmontant contrasts the Judeo-Christian absolute with systems rooted in polytheism. He notes the divisions within polytheism, which results in clashes among the gods. It is from this setting of warring chaos that some philosophical systems attempt to explain their cosmology. It is also at this level that one finds the roots of Manichaean dualism and its war between the principles of good and evil (matter).

Tresmontant establishes that this forces people to make fundamental choices with limited options. Logic dictates an absolute, either one or many, encompassed by or transcending the whole. That Judeo-Christian thought rejects the theogonic myths, Tresmontant posits, is well established early on as found in the *Yahwistic* and *Priestly* writings.²³ It is at this level that people encounter the unique basis of Hebrew thought as distinct.

Precision on this level is important because it defines core elements of the divine as conceived by a particular philosophy. It is noteworthy to consider that these systems truly are philosophical systems. They are not derived from supernatural revelation.

Tresmontant takes issue with the mythical content underpinning the mainline philosophies found in both East and West.²⁴ In the Hindu Upanishads, Greek philosophy, Or-

²² Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 37.

²³ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 38.

²⁴ Tresmontant's reference to myth is meant to draw attention to the earliest narratives which sought to describe the origins of the universe. He is concerned to establish the fact that these foundational accounts are presupposed in all cultures and are the basis from which thought derives. In other words, all philosophical and religious beliefs in some way begin with myths already in place.

phic thought, the writings of Empedocles, and sporadically in Plato and Aristotle, he finds the myths that concern the division of the one, the fall of souls, and the theme of return.

Tresmontant makes explicit the foundational beliefs found in each of these philosophical systems. They are axiomatic and play a crucial role in how they develop. These axiomatic beliefs directly connect with a philosophical conception of the absolute. According to Tresmontant, “every metaphysics is organically united to a certain conception of the absolute, and depends upon this conception.”²⁵

To illustrate these points, I will draw from his work *La Métaphysique du Christianisme*. In this work, Tresmontant argues that the earliest philosophical systems took a position on the absolute that is foreign to Judeo-Christian thought. For example, he mentions that within the Upanishads there is a *generation of the one*. He likens this to other *theogonic* explanations of the absolute.²⁶ Concerning Greek thought, Tresmontant notes the repeated theme of the liberated soul found throughout their literature. Tresmontant believed that a person has the ability to trace this thought back to a common source. He points to Orphism as the root of all Gnostic systems. From this source Christianity encountered, and continues to encounter, Gnosticism in all its permutations.²⁷

In several writings of Empedocles we find the belief that all beings were originally contained within the one absolute. The implications of such a belief stand in contradiction to a Judeo-Christian notion of creation. Tresmontant cites Aristotle’s *Physics* (I, 8, 191 a) where Aristotle confirmed that the ancients were mistaken when they looked

²⁵ Tresmontant, *Biblical Metaphysics*, 231.

²⁶ Claude Tresmontant, *La Métaphysique du Christianisme et la Naissance de la Philosophie Chrétienne* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1961) 250.

²⁷ Tresmontant, *La Métaphysique du Christianisme*, 266.

on generation, birth, and death as mere appearances. There can be only one being, and therefore only one subject. Tresmontant points out through this comparison the vast difference that this implies. He contrasts the weight and worth of persons as conceived by Judeo-Christian thought, which sees in their appearance the gift of being, not as necessarily derived from the Absolute, since the being itself is part of the Absolute, but as another freely given existence.²⁸

Tresmontant assesses the work of Plato and Aristotle while duly recognizing the complexity of their thought. He notes that they inherited dualistic tendencies, but their genius allowed them to further their predecessors' thoughts. He admits that while some level of dualism exists in their thought, in particular the divide between evil matter and the good soul, he found within Platonic thought an optimism that recognizes the interplay between matter and order.²⁹ Werner Jaeger shared this same insight when he noted that Plato recognized order within the cosmos, giving an optimistic assessment of reality. He notes, "the cosmos of Plato's *Timaeus* made the education of man possible, for it requires for its realization a cosmic and not a chaotic world. In his *Laws* we find a statement that relates all that is said in that work about the right *paideia* to God as its ultimate source. God is the pedagogue of the universe, *ho theos paidagogei tom kosmon*."³⁰

Aristotle, according to Tresmontant, also defended a form of dualism. This is evident in his writing to Proclus where Aristotle seeks to explain the preexistence of the soul. He gives an account of the soul's forgetfulness upon assuming flesh. His later writings in *De Anima* presented a more evolved view of the soul and he rejects Orphic and

²⁸ Tresmontant, *La Métaphysique du Christianisme*, 270.

²⁹ Tresmontant, *La Métaphysique du Christianisme*, 276.

³⁰ Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1961) 66.

Platonic dualism. It is this latter rejection of dualism that allowed Christian thinkers to build on his work.³¹ Nevertheless, as Tresmontant maintains, the cosmology of Aristotle teaches that “the world is uncreated, eternal, imperishable. It is the absolute.”³²

The aforementioned reflections by Tresmontant serve a very specific purpose. They establish that the Judeo-Christian understanding of the absolute is in contrast to numerous other ancient beliefs. In these considerations, the problem of the one and the many is brought to the fore again. Throughout the work of Tresmontant, the unique metaphysical system attributable to Judeo-Christianity finds its roots in Sacred Scripture. In addition to the authority of Sacred Scripture, he uses Church teaching from the First Vatican Council. After listing the traditional divine attributes, the Council speaks of a God who “must be declared to be really and essentially distinct from the world, and in himself and of himself most blessed and ineffably exalted above all things which are and which can be conceived outside him.”³³

Tresmontant portrays materialism as a metaphysical option. Similar to pantheism, it stands in contradiction to a Judeo-Christian understanding of the absolute. Materialism pronounces the world as absolute. In the words of Tresmontant, the world “is the absolute because it is uncreated, eternal, self-creative, infinite in space and time, ontologically sufficient, furnished therefore with the classic attributes reserved to the absolute.”³⁴ In contrast he notes that the “knowledge of the absolute conceived as transcendent, free and creative, was only achieved among the people of God.”³⁵

³¹ Tresmontant, *La Métaphysique du Christianisme*, 281.

³² Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 38.

³³ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics* 39. Denz, 1782; (Denzinger-Bannwart-Umberg-Rahner, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 31st edition, 1960)

³⁴ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 41.

³⁵ Claude Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, trans. Robert J. Olsen (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1959) 118.

Section 4: Creation

I will now consider the role of creation in Judeo-Christian thought. Tresmontant calls the idea of creation “the keystone of Biblical theology and of Biblical metaphysics, of Christian theology and metaphysics.” He points out that Islam and Christianity notably share the idea of creation, which comes from the encounter of God with the People of Israel. The absolute is not the world and the world is not the absolute. It is creation, according to Tresmontant, which provides the relationship between the world and the absolute.³⁶

Tresmontant maintains that the distinct view of creation held by Jews and Christians comes from the priestly account of creation and was subsequently affirmed by the Prophets and other biblical authors. These early sources are credited with correcting prevalent creation myths found among the Egyptians and Assyrio-Babylonians. He once again mentions that the unique account maintained by the Jewish people stood in contradiction to other established views concerning the origin of the cosmos, notably those of Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Neoplatonism, and Gnosticism.³⁷

I cannot explore fully the creation metaphysics of Tresmontant. I will focus on those key pieces of his writings that will allow me to survey his contribution to metaphysics in the present context. The following quotation presents this context and the role that creation plays within the metaphysics of Tresmontant:

The first chapters of Genesis, the recital of creation, are the great foundation stone of Christian metaphysics, from the beginning, through the centuries, and at the present day. When Christian thought struggled with the Gnostics, it was the recital of creation to which it appealed in defense of

³⁶ Claude Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, trans. Mark Pontifex, Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Philosophy 11, ed. Henri Daniel-Rops (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963) 27.

³⁷ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 47.

the excellence of creation, of the natural world, of physical and bodily reality, of the unity of the one creator God. When the Fathers criticize Origen it was again in the name of the biblical doctrine of creation, and also of marriage, and of biblical anthropology. The account in Genesis was his strongest weapon when Augustine disputed with the Manichees. In the twelfth century against the Catharists, and in the nineteenth century against German idealism, when Catholic thought had to reformulate its own metaphysical principles, it was again the great priestly passage at the beginning of our Bibles which was appealed to and quoted, and which formed the touchstone of orthodox Christian metaphysics.³⁸

Tresmontant brought together scriptural teaching, Patristic teaching, and Church doctrine about creation to form a coherent whole. Four principles offered by Tresmontant, pertaining to creation, provide an outline. First, creation is the work of one God. Second, creation is a free act of God, and is not imposed upon him “either by an external necessity (destiny, fate) or by an internal necessity of development. “Cosmogony is in no way theogony.”³⁹ Tresmontant believes this is in contrast to the Gnostic and theosophical system of Hegel. Tresmontant says, “creation is grace; it is the first grace which Hugh of St Victor called the *gratia creatrix*, and which he distinguished from the *gratia salvatrix* and *reparatrix*. Creation is the work of the love of God. Christianity is a metaphysic of love.”⁴⁰ Third, un-created and eternal matter is unnecessary within the context of true creation. Creation implies no preexisting matter, the matter, however conceived, relies on, and has its origin, in God. Fourth, “creation is not an emanation, of the divine substance, not a procession from the divine substance. Creation is not a generation.”⁴¹

³⁸ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 36.

³⁹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 56.

⁴⁰ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 48.

⁴¹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 49.

Tresmontant makes it explicit that it is the Logos that proceeds from the Father, not the world. This is the doctrine of creation called *ex nihilo*.⁴²

Tresmontant lays out two hypotheses about creation. It is important that the reader grasps the necessity of having to choose. He asks the reader to choose between these two hypotheses with no recourse to other options. “Either the world is eternal and never had a beginning, or else the world came into existence a few billion years ago.”⁴³ His concern is that the universe had an actual date rather than trying to establish when that date took place. In other words, whenever the universe came into existence, it happened then and does in fact have a “time stamp.”

The first hypothesis posits that the world is eternal. In summary, he clarifies what an eternal world would mean, and what it could not mean. Modern science has led us to know that the *earth* is not eternal. We know it had a beginning in time. The eternity of matter likely is implied. In this case matter and space, in some form, have always existed and this has played itself out as an eternal series of permutations. “We are thus confronted with the image of an eternal cosmic history, conceived as an everlasting palpitation: an endless recurrence of evolutions and involutions, syntheses and disintegrations.”⁴⁴ Tresmontant asks in relationship to this physical process how it can account for the coming to be of new beings, living creatures that were not and then are.⁴⁵ Tresmontant states that this experience of creation is not properly accounted for in the first hypothesis. This everyday experience of “coming to be” is powerful enough to throw this thesis into question.

⁴² Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 49.

⁴³ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 2.

⁴⁴ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 2.

⁴⁵ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 3.

The coming to be of *persons* will later help me to confront those mysterious ontological questions. Despite the fact that human beings adhere to different philosophies and profess different faith convictions, every person faces the mystery of coming to be. The only account people have of themselves is that of their conception and birth. People have no recollection of themselves before conception and birth. This compelled Proclus to elaborate upon Aristotle's explanation of this forgetfulness. It is necessary to account for human forgetfulness since it requires an act of faith to believe that human preexistence is in fact the case. It is possible to ask what is essential in the soul that allows it to be the self-same soul that both pre-existed and then was incarnated? What is the principle of identity in the soul that allows it to be stripped of all it was and possessed while remaining itself?

A way out of this quandary is to adopt a metaphysics that holds that everything pre-exists. What appears to us as a coming to be is actually "an appearing, an emerging of souls at the level of appearances, and these souls pre-existed in the heart of the One, the heart of the Absolute."⁴⁶ This is the view held by those sources recently mentioned, the Upanishads, the writings of Empedocles and also in Orphism. This explanation allows people to answer the above question of the identity of the soul by appealing to the primacy of the One and the appearance of the many.

The second hypothesis contends that the world came into being. Tresmontant defends this hypothesis through an appeal to science and its contention of an expanding universe. An expanding universe implies a beginning. According to Tresmontant, "we live in a world in which creation is the rule."⁴⁷ Creation continuously happens all the

⁴⁶ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 2-4.

⁴⁷ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 6.

time and it is part of the human experience of the world. He asks whether there is need of a creator to make sense of creation. He concedes to those who believe that the answer is found in our preexistence. However, he cautions that to accept this position is to reject empirical knowledge, “giving up philosophy and proposing myths.”⁴⁸

In comparison with those who doubt that the human mind is able to achieve when endeavoring to answer large questions such as these, Tresmontant is optimistic. Again, he refers to the ontological mystery concerning our very existence. He demonstrates the insufficiency of accepting a skeptical stand in relationship to what the human mind is able to come to know. Tresmontant writes:

We exist, we are alive, but our existence and our life are a wonder and a mystery to us all. It is a fact, of course, that we exist, but a fact which we cannot explain. That the whole universe exists is another datum which is not self-explanatory, nor can we account for this fact either. We may study the structure of the universe, and of matter and life, or we may consider their development and evolution, but we are always without the answer to the question of being and existence. The universe is existent, with all the infinite richness of its structure and diversity, its development and evolution. But its very existence seems to be a fact which in itself requires some kind of explanation. Mere verification of the world’s existence is not sufficient for us.⁴⁹

Tresmontant finds it does not suffice to accept the negative critique of Kant that answers this question by positing the limitation of human understanding. He accuses Kant of a particular type of dogmatism that too quickly limits the extent of human knowing. This pessimism tends to “prohibit the metaphysical quest, not to invite it. It is, nevertheless, an illegitimate and unjustified dogmatism. Indeed, how could human reason possibly know *a priori* the limits of the possible or the impossible when it is not self-

⁴⁸ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 8.

⁴⁹ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 8.

created? It cannot know its own potentialities in the complete way, especially since metaphysical research is in the initial stage?”⁵⁰

An intriguing point made by Tresmontant was that Kant failed to recognize that the relationship between the creature and the creator is itself a context out of which the one thinking is able to think. A preexistent context cannot be ignored. The hypothesis we accept radically affects what we consider the limits of human reason. This context precedes the thought of the one thinking. Tresmontant admits that to adopt a methodology that purposely brackets out types of thought may prove useful. To eliminate radically metaphysics, however, is premature. Tresmontant argues:

A provisional omission of all metaphysical affirmations rests upon certain possible hypotheses which require elucidation. Either we live in the Absolute, having our existence, motion and thought within it, or else we do not. There is no middle ground. And the provisional exclusion changes in meaning with one or the other hypothesis. That is, it is impossible to treat the problem of knowledge unless we adopt one of these hypotheses even though we pretended to accept neither. The soul is either created or uncreated. The whole problem of knowledge is posed in two different ways according to the hypothesis we adopt. It is impossible to avoid the alternative, for we cannot study the structure of human reason or evaluate its power without posing the question of that radical origin.⁵¹

Tresmontant provides the reader with another refutation of Kant’s limiting approach. He believes Kant constructed an artificial point of departure. He eliminates the metaphysical questions proper to philosophy. Tresmontant addresses Kant’s critique. He says:

The Kantian conscious subject will not discover the Absolute, because the whole analysis has been carried out with the presupposition that there is no dependence on the Absolute, and that the act of knowing does not originate in the Absolute. But this is exactly what ought to be verified first of all. If it is true that we exist and live and move within the absolute, the

⁵⁰ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 15.

⁵¹ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 17.

problem of knowledge is posed in a wholly different way, and Kant's critique can only lead us into error. For if there is an Absolute then we must determine whether the empirical datum that the critique accepts, which is the world of experience, is even possible. The conscious subject certainly exists. But this existence is necessarily created or uncreated. These are the two possibilities that we must consider now. There are *only* two possibilities for metaphysics. There is no middle ground. Either we must turn toward a metaphysics of creation of the biblical type, or else toward a metaphysics which teaches that the self is uncreated.⁵²

Throughout his writings, Tresmontant explores the shortcomings of Kant's thought. He finds his work debilitating because it does not allow for the advancement of philosophy. He deems Kant's work overly subjective and inward. In other words, Kant's approach renders the subject incapable of escaping its own self-imposed prison. It does not allow itself to encounter other beings. He states:

Kantian critique is based upon a factitious presupposition, an uncritical and artificial separation between the conscious subject and being. Inevitably and ultimately, the mind no longer finds anything within itself which would confirm its consciousness of existence. The subject remains enclosed in a total subjectivity, simply because of an analysis conducted in artificial circumstances and conditions that are not relevant to the subject at all.⁵³

Needless to say, Tresmontant did not feel impeded in his metaphysical pursuits due to the Kantian critique of knowledge.

In his *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel*, Tresmontant discusses the contributions made by Blondel in the area of creation. He argued that Blondel's work was not fully appreciated. The following offers a short overview of the exposé of Blondel by Tresmontant concerning creation.⁵⁴

⁵² Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 22.

⁵³ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 36.

⁵⁴ Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel*, 124-134.

In agreement with Blondel, Tresmontant notes that the unique view of the Absolute offered by Judeo-Christian thought is the basis for seeing creation as a work of *agape*. It is the generosity of a free creative absolute that is found within Judeo-Christian thought that provides a uniquely Christian metaphysic of creation. A portrait of the absolute that has compulsion as the driving force of the world and all existent beings does not allow for a view of creation that evidences a theology of charity and grace.

The Gnostic elimination of the Christian supernatural is a natural outgrowth of the pantheistic concept of the Absolute. Although this view is consistent, it achieves an anti-creation perspective. In other words, this position eliminates a free God who chooses to create in love.

In his account of creation, Blondel insists on the perfect happiness of Absolute Being, as a Trinitarian communion, with no need to realize itself through any process of divine alienation and divine retrieval. Blondel therefore portrays the distinctive view of creation as gift. He asserts the divine “I AM” has fullness of being, and in this fullness freely bestows existence to others.⁵⁵ Indeed, this leads to a consideration of the “why” of creation. Why would an all-sufficient Being choose to create? Tresmontant exposes two traditional answers as false. One way is to deny the ontological distinction between absolute being and created beings. This position attempts to magnify the reality of the One and account for the others (the many) as mere illusions or manifestations of the One. With the other solution, the “Hegelian dialectic is put ‘on its head.’ Beings do not proceed from the idea; it is the Idea that is an abstraction extracted from the concrete.”⁵⁶ In

⁵⁵ Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel*, 125.

⁵⁶ Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel*, 126. On remet la dialectique hégélienne <<sur ses pieds>>. Les êtres ne procèdent pas de l’Idée, - c’est l’idée qui est une abstraction extradite des êtres concrets.

other words, to take seriously the reality of the concrete beings, it is necessary to view the Absolute as the product that results from the whole of concrete beings.

He found the same type of problem when he approached the topic of action. Tresmontant framed the problem of action to explain how Blondel sought to solve it. The problem is due to the two aforementioned tendencies, the first, of stressing the reality of the one at the expense of the many, and the other, of stressing human action to a point of eliminating the absolute, which in our case is God. The task, according to Tresmontant, is to take seriously both realities, not to exalt one at the expense of the other.⁵⁷ Strictly speaking, Tresmontant is not a Thomistic philosopher, however in approaching difficult questions, such as those pertaining to action or being, he recognizes the genius of St. Thomas. He notes that Thomas' firm affirmation of terms allows for the harmonization of beings and Being, and the action of human beings and the action of God.⁵⁸

The merit of Blondel's work is that it gives full weight to each of these opposing views. In this way, Tresmontant believes Blondel's work possesses aspects of Aquinas's genius. Blondel insists on the both/and rather than the either/or. He insists that people take seriously the fullness of being contained in the absolute, this being the Trinitarian life. On the other hand, recognition of the one must not undermine the reality of beings. It is within this context that he recognizes the danger of Hegelian Idealism.⁵⁹ I believe that Tresmontant thinks the work of Blondel greatly contributes to a metaphysics of creation.⁶⁰ One familiar with Blondel's work will find his influence throughout the writings of Tresmontant.

⁵⁷ Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel*, 127.

⁵⁸ Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel*, 128.

⁵⁹ Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel*, 128.

⁶⁰ Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Métaphysique de Maurice Blondel*, 134.

Tresmontant believes the modern tools of contemporary philosophy need to be used in this exploration. One such tool is Information Theory. This tool carries with it the intellectual advantage of not being rooted in speculative thought. Instead, it comes from experimental analysis in the area of message communication. He proposes that the application of this tool will profit investigations into the topic of creation. Tresmontant asserts that the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation expresses the belief that creation itself does indeed communicate a message. The acknowledgement of this message leaves open the question of the origin of this communication. The second step consists in determining who or what is behind the message. However, he insists that to say that no one communicates it and that these messages come from nothing markedly is absurd. Modern atheism promotes this absurdity. In contrast, he maintains that nature provides an intelligent language. This conviction has led Christian thinkers to consider creation as one of the two paths to the knowledge of God. I see in Tresmontant's assertion that the natural sciences are an introduction to theology, the result of his positive appraisal of both creation and the human intellect.⁶¹

Tresmontant's God is free, conscious, and personal. Only with this conception of God is it possible to have a gratuitous creation. In Plotinus, for example, the One is above consciousness. Consciousness results from the division produced within the heart of the One.⁶² If consciousness derives from the division of the absolute, it does not speak positively for consciousness. Tresmontant seeks to contrast the negative view of consciousness as found in Hegel with the positive view found in Biblical thought. In Biblical thought, consciousness is at the heart of creation. It is here that the God of the universe

⁶¹ Claude Tresmontant, *Introduction à la Théologie Chrétienne* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974) 80-81.

⁶² Claude Tresmontant, *Études de Métaphysique Biblique* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 1955), 170.

chooses to freely create. He cites Deuteronomy 7:7-8 as evidencing within the Sacred Scriptures that God chooses human beings and freely loves them.⁶³ Within the history of philosophy, this portrayal of the divine is the unique contribution of Israel. Tresmontant insists that the Biblical metaphysics is not a fabrication of human hands but comes from the relationship of Yahweh with Israel. Tresmontant notes this is a position contrary to reason. Pure reason leads one to adhere to a God more in line with that of Spinoza.⁶⁴ A personal and creative God is not the result of pure reason. It results from an encounter with a particular people in time who struggled with the information given to them by God. It is clear that the people of Israel were constantly tempted to abandon the God to which they were bound and to replace him with one of their own making.

Creation, according to Tresmontant, is not a one-time event. On the contrary, it is an ongoing phenomenon. Ontologically, it is a relationship of continual dependence, since the world and matter are not self-sufficient. In addition to being, one must account for the fact that all is constantly becoming. According to Tresmontant, the reality of becoming is vastly underestimated. In simply recounting the history of the physical universe we are continually faced with this becoming. Without elaborating on the intricacies of his thoughts pertaining to evolution in this paper, he is convinced of some form of evolution. However, a belief in any evolution poses serious questions. As Tresmontant puts it, we evolve from hydrogen clouds to living, thinking human beings. Although there are variously proposed forms of evolution, Tresmontant always returns to the same question:

⁶³ Tresmontant, *Études de Métaphysique Biblique*, 178. Deut. 7:7-8. "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, and from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotations, including this one, are taken from the Revised Standard Version. I will indicate when they belong to Tresmontant or others.

⁶⁴ Tresmontant, *Études de Métaphysique Biblique*, 182

how can the greater come from the lesser? It is exactly this reception of new being which must be made sense of. The world is constantly receiving new being. How is this so? This, according to Tresmontant, is not accounted for by the mere existence of the world. There is a dependence and a causality that must be explained.⁶⁵

Tresmontant takes causality seriously. Based on his perception of biblical thought he defends the understanding of the Hebrew people in relation to this topic. He notes that Hebrew thought is often reproached for having a simplistic notion of causality. Philosophers often level criticism against the Hebrew understanding of primary and secondary causes. Tresmontant explains that the Hebrew people were able to discern the operation of the first cause in and with the secondary cause. This first cause then is able to act in and with human beings without harming the integrity of their freedom.⁶⁶

Section 5: Tresmontant's Methodology

In the area of creation Tresmontant employs a particular method. He begins each study by drawing from the biblical sources to establish what they have to say about a coherent picture of reality. He then seeks to clarify this view in light of other systems that stand in contradiction to it. He usually follows this with a logical exposé of what each position entails. In effect, he begins with particular axioms and shows the logical outgrowth that derives from these particular axiomatic positions. He does the same with the varied axioms found in each system and then compares them all. He then consults the teachings of the Fathers of the Church and the pronouncements of Ecumenical Councils and authoritative church teaching to support a biblically derived coherent philosophy.

⁶⁵ Tresmontant, *Introduction a la Théologie Chrétienne*, 61.

⁶⁶ Tresmontant, *Études de Métaphysique Biblique*, 165.

One possible way to challenge the thought of Tresmontant is to call into question his reading of scripture. If one were to find fault with his reading of scripture, one could call into question the entire system that he constructs on questionable axiomatic principles. To quell this challenge, Tresmontant consults the writings of the Early Church Fathers and the pronouncements of the Ecumenical Councils. By so doing he shows that he has constructed a system that is consistent with these revered interpreters of scripture and the authority of the Church.

It is now possible to understand the methodology of Tresmontant. After citing the New Testament passages that are related to creation, he cites the Shepherd of Hermas, who writes in his *Commandments*, “there is but one god, who has created all and set it in order, who has made everything pass from nothing to being, who upholds everything, and alone is upheld by nothing.”⁶⁷ He quotes Aristides and his teaching that God is “without beginning and eternal, immortal and needing nothing, while the elements themselves are not gods; they are corruptible and subject to change; they have been produced out of not being by a commandment of him who is truly God.”⁶⁸ He then uses Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, the author of the *Elenchos* (which was formerly attributed to Origen), Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, St. Aphraates, Basil of Caesarea and St. Augustine.⁶⁹

Each of these writers attests to particular points of doctrine. Tresmontant elicits these people to support his position. One by one he claims support for doctrines such as creation *ex nihilo*, creation as distinct from the absolute, the role of matter, the eternal

⁶⁷ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 40.

⁶⁸ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 40.

⁶⁹ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 40-45.

existence of God, the insufficiency of the universe to account for itself, and God's freedom to create. Tresmontant chooses helpful passages from the Fathers to elucidate his points of discussion. He highlights passages by the Early Church Fathers that correct Greek thought when it is incongruous with Christian positions. He uses Clement, for example, to correct Aristotle's views about creation. Clement writes, "the father of the school (the Peripatetics), instead of conceiving the father of the universe, believes that he whom he calls 'most high' is the soul of all; that is to say, he contradicts himself by regarding the soul of the world as god."⁷⁰

The fourth level of support Tresmontant uses (after biblical exposé, and employment of logic and garnering support from the Fathers of the Church) is a presentation of official church teaching throughout the ages. Beginning with the Apostles' Creed, he explains the Judeo-Christian belief in creation. He quotes the Council of Nicea, and points out how the council aimed to correct misguided theosophical systems that posited forms of dualism rejected by the church.⁷¹

The First Council of Constantinople then follows Nicea in 381. The Council of Toledo followed with a decree. Tresmontant indicates the Council's desire to correct the mistakes of the Priscillianists who adopted a Manichaean metaphysics. He quotes two anathematizations:

1. If anyone says or believes that this world, together with all its elements, was not made by the omnipotent God, let him be anathema.

9. If anyone says or believes that the world was made by another God and not by him of whom it is written: *in the beginning God made heaven and earth*, let him be anathema.⁷²

⁷⁰ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 43.

⁷¹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 50.

⁷² Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 51.

He then references the Fourth Lateran Council convened in 1215. The Council states:

We firmly believe and simply confess that the true God is one only, eternal, immeasurable and unchangeable, incomprehensible, omnipotent and ineffable, Father and Son and Holy Ghost...; the sole origin of all things, creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal; who by his omnipotent excellence formed out of nothing from the beginning of time at once both the spiritual creature and the corporeal, that is to say the angelic and the worldly, and thereafter the human, as if jointly constituted of spirit and body.⁷³

Tresmontant again points out the heresy of dualism and its reemergence throughout history. In this case, it was the twelfth century. The Church once again sought to re-establish the goodness of matter in the body. He writes that the Council of Florence of 1442 reaffirmed this position. It said that both the spiritual and corporeal aspects of creatures were in fact good “because they were made by the supreme good, but changeable because they were made out of nothing; and she declares that there is no nature of evil because all nature, insofar as it is nature, is good.”⁷⁴

Tresmontant continues this approach up and through the First Vatican Council of 1870 and concludes with the Canons three, four and five which reiterate the preceding council's teaching clearly and explicitly.

“The metaphysic of charity” is a phrase that Tresmontant adopted from Fr. Laberthonnière, and is a theme that he believes most accurately describes the freedom and generosity which is evidenced in creation. Opposed to this freedom is any type of necessity in God to become aware of himself, and to then bring about this awareness through the unfolding of creation. This is what he says is to be found in Hegel’s system. A favorite

⁷³ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 51-52.

⁷⁴ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 53.

saying of Tresmontant in opposition to German idealism, or any like system, is that “cosmogony is in no way theogony.”⁷⁵

Offering proper theological and philosophical nuance, Tresmontant counsels his readers that a proper reading of both the Biblical and conciliar texts is a necessity. In his own words:

It is necessary to recall here that in the chapters of a constitution promulgated by an Ecumenical Council, it is advisable, from the theological point of view as well as from the metaphysical, to distinguish between what the Fathers of the Council have in view (what they wish to define, or, more exactly, what they wish to preserve, to protect, their intention), and their language, the representations, their way of expressing themselves. These latter can be bound up with a given culture, with a given vision of the world, with the state of knowledge in a given period, and for that very reason can constitute a veneer which is possibly decayed. One cannot therefore take the chapters of an Ecumenical Council as the geometrician takes the propositions from which he makes mathematical deductions. One must ask in the first place what doctrine the Fathers of the council wish to repel. By virtue of this, the canon of a Council and its anathematizations in an apophatic manner define more exactly the intention, the aim of the Council, what it wishes to repel and refuse, and what, in the same way, it wishes to protect and save in the thought of the Church.⁷⁶

He then explains the necessity of a scientific approach to both scripture and conciliar texts. Tresmontant indicates, within his discussion of creation, what is and what is not defined by the teaching of the church. He uses the example of Origen in the *De Principiis* to indicate what might be permissible. Origen asked whether the biblical teaching on creation pertained only to this world, without having to necessarily limit God’s possible creativity before and after this world. Tresmontant sees no doctrinal problem with

⁷⁵ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 56.

⁷⁶ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 58.

this position either biblically or doctrinally, so long as this creative process is not a necessary component of God's nature.⁷⁷

He recalls the thirteenth century debate between St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure to show how to employ distinctions that allow for greater precision. Aquinas considered the possibility of an eternal world. He understood this in a particular sense that did not need to be contradictory to creation. The world could have been created from all eternity. However, the absolute dependence of the world upon God and its lack of consubstantial status would have to be posited.⁷⁸ St. Bonaventure did not consider this a possibility, even in the abstract. For Bonaventure, creation implied an actual beginning in time. Thomas was thinking in the abstract as to the possible, but "to philosophize about the reality existing in fact, is another matter. In fact, and from the point of view of our experience as it is known today, to speak of an eternal universe has little meaning...but it remains possible to suppose an eternal creation, that is to say a creation which will eternally renew beings and things."⁷⁹

In treating the method of Claude Tresmontant, let us evaluate the order of his system. The first level of his thought begins with the data of revelation as found in scripture. This, however, does not render him religiously biased in such a way as to be useless to the "objective philosopher". He points out that the starting presuppositions used by all philosophers involve some level of mythological faith.⁸⁰ One's choice of beliefs regarding the absolute, for instance, is not unlimited. Logic demands that one choose a position, or at the very least, refuse to choose, but minimally admit that logic requires that the

⁷⁷ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 59.

⁷⁸ Tresmontant, *Introduction a la Théologie Chrétienne*, 64.

⁷⁹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 60.

⁸⁰ It should be noted that this is a contentious assertion and not all traditional Thomists and Neo-Thomists would accept such a claim.

truth of one cancel out contradictory alternatives. In other words, upon finding the true Absolute, opposing “absolutes” cancel each other out. That some may claim that we are unable to ever know fully the true absolute does not mean we should not be clear in coming to grips with the mandates of logic.

The basis in scripture is open to exegetical scrutiny. This may be fruitfully pursued in future studies. Tresmontant admitted that he relied on the latest biblical scholarship available when he began writing. Later in his career, he became more confident in his own reading of scripture and postulated some new biblical theories.⁸¹ A critical look at Tresmontant would not so much call into question his interpretation of scripture as much as his subsequent elaboration on these texts. It is his manner of interpreting the texts and the implications inherent in his interpretation of them that may lead some to question his findings.

The second level of logical exposition is Tresmontant’s comparison of philosophical systems. He does this to illumine points of agreement and difference and to indicate where the logical development of these systems leads. One example of such a logical development with real and substantial consequences is in his *Études de Métaphysique Biblique*, where he employs this method to the Gnostic conception of God.⁸² The system of the Gnostics and of Plotinus explains the process of God’s becoming. This process of

⁸¹ Tresmontant, *The Hebrew Christ*, 319.

⁸² Tresmontant, *Études de Métaphysique Biblique*, 167-168:

“Les gnostiques reprennent un theme tout proche de celui de Plotin, mais en le perfectionnant. Ils ajoutent cette idée, que si l’Absolu s’est divisé et aliéné dans le multiple et dans le monde, c’est qu’il avait envie de courir cette aventure tragique dans laquelle il se complait. Bien plus, il en avait besoin. Sans cette tragédie, sans le négative, le vie de Dieu serait fadeur et ennui. L’histoire humaine, le déchirement et la douleur du monde, sont aussi l’histoire, le déchirement et le douleur de Dieu, sans lesquelles il serait solitude sans vie. La guerre est un element constitutive de la vie divine. La tragédie et la guerre sont le sel du monde. On voit comment une Métaphysique en apparence loin des contingences historiques peut proposer des themes qui porteront leur fruit dans l’histoire. Dans la Métaphysique gnostique, telle qu’elle apparaît rationalisée et portée à sa perfection chez Hegel, se trouvent les elements d’une justification théologique, mystique de la guerre.”

becoming involves division, alienation, and eventual resolution. It follows that the tragedies experienced by people, and most especially the tragedy of war is a necessary component in this process. Since history itself is the dramatic playing out of the process of the absolute, war becomes a constitutive element of the divine life. Gnostic metaphysics, perfected in Hegel, leads to a mystification of war. This is then theologically justified.

Much of Hegel's work finds expression originally in Heraclitus. Tresmontant mentions that Hegel makes the admission that there is not a single proposition of Heraclitus that he does not discuss in his own work. According to Heraclitus, the physical universe resulted from the expansion of eternal fire, and was the cause of division and diversification. Heraclitus called this division war. The return, or process of peace, results in the annihilation of the diversity of beings. Because of this teaching, peace and friendship are the principles of annihilation.⁸³

Logically, Christian thought is not tied to this process. The Judeo-Christian God stands apart from his creation and therefore requires no turn of worldly events to bring about his fulfillment. In his perfection, he transcends the world. This transcendent God desires peace and good for his people even though no amount of good or evil affects him in his essence. His desire for peace is the free longing for the fulfillment of his creation, and more specifically each creature. This type of reflection represents the logical exposition of Tresmontant as he fleshes out an axiomatic metaphysical position and attempts to demonstrate its logical conclusion. These axiomatic metaphysical starting points lead to serious conclusions.

The third and fourth steps intend to display the consistency found in remaining faithful to the Biblical foundations of Christian thought. In calling on the Early Church

⁸³ Claude Tresmontant, *Les Metaphysiques Principales* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1989), 19-20.

Fathers, Tresmontant displays how they developed these themes in a coherent manner. I must note that this is not his starting point. He uses this as the finishing strokes of a painting that has been long in the making. The weight of these councils, however, does add force to his reading of scripture and his argument.

What I have called the scholarly methodology of Tresmontant is visible when considering the full body of his work. In his *Christian Metaphysics*, for example, these four steps receive equal weight. However, in other manuscripts we find Tresmontant concentrating more heavily on one or two of these steps. For example, this is the case in *A Study of Hebrew Thought*. In this work, he presents an in-depth study of Hebrew thought, followed by a logical analysis of the text.

Although Tresmontant concentrates heavily on creation and its implications, I will now investigate several other themes addressed by him. This will further provide a means for evaluating Tresmontant's thought. He writes, "we shall observe how this metaphysical system, to which the key is the idea of creation, has its own particular inner coherence, just as we might demonstrate the inevitable logical consequences of the absence or rejection of this idea in the philosophies which ignore or deny it."⁸⁴ A rejection of the idea of creation will necessitate a rejection of the concepts of time, person, and love.⁸⁵ Regarding time, Werner Jaeger, while explaining the inability of Greek thought to develop a theology of history, made a somewhat similar claim. The Greek efforts were considered lacking by the Christians that evaluated them. He writes that:

[The Greek attempts] at demonstrating cultural evolution either in terms of Democritean causality or of Aristotelian teleology could not satisfy Christian thinkers. His [Origen's] basically different concept of cosmology

⁸⁴ Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, trans. Michael Francis Gibson (New York: Desclée de Brouwer Company, 1960), 14.

⁸⁵ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 15.

(cosmogony as creation) necessitated a philosophy of the mind and of human culture that looked for a plan in the world of history comparable to the divine planning of the physical world.⁸⁶

Section 6: Matter

Tresmontant's reflection on creation naturally leads to a consideration of matter and its relation to his entire metaphysical system. He begins his discussion of matter by elaborating on the distinction between creation and fabrication that he adopts mainly from Henri Bergson. Fabrication "proceeds from periphery to center, or, as the philosopher would put it, from the many to the one. But organization proceeds from the center outwards. It starts from a point which is almost a mathematical point and spreads around it in ever widening waves."⁸⁷ Organization is an act of creation. He explains that fabrication requires matter whereas creation does not begin with any matter whatsoever. Fabrication takes natural objects, already in existence, and manipulates them to some end. In line with Aristotle, Bergson believes a fabricated object worthy of ontological status, but is not worthy of the status of a subject.⁸⁸

Human thought is already astray when people conceive of matter as underlying reality. To clarify this position, Tresmontant makes the following assertion:

The body does not model itself on the corpse. An organism is not a synthesis of multiplicity made one by some principle of unity called the soul. The organism grows from a germ which is a unity, and spreads outwards by assimilating exterior elements and integrating them. To say that a living organism is a composite of multiple matter unified by a "form" is an inversion of the understanding, an assumption that the multiple came first, that life is constructed from ashes.

⁸⁶ Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 63.

⁸⁷ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 39.

⁸⁸ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 40.

Fabrication, we have said, assembles various materials and binds them together within a certain form. This form, however, remains outward, extrinsic, and does not really “inform” the material used. Hence a dualism of “matter” and “form.” Creative organization, contrariwise, actually does shape the elements which it incorporates; once taken in they are no longer what they were nor what they will return to after death. Unity rules, not outwardly, but inwardly by transformation. The whole precedes the parts because a living organism *is* a form and man *is* a “living soul.” With life there is not substantial duality of “matter and “form.”⁸⁹

Tresmontant is once again concerned with avoiding a misunderstanding concerning creation. The idea of formless matter merely existing and awaiting use undermines the original need for God’s creative act to bring into being real things. The belief in formless chaos leads to an uncomfortable closeness to a mythology that is not Christian.

Tresmontant presents three different views of matter before contrasting them with Hebrew thought. The first view (matter as opposed to mind) is that of Platonic or Orphic dualism. He notes that in this strain of thought “matter itself is a substance, *res extensa*, which stands opposed to mind, *res cogitans*.”⁹⁰ The second option (matter as a metaphysical principle) is the Aristotelian or Thomistic view⁹¹. The Thomistic and Aristotelian framework sees matter as a metaphysical principle. There is no such thing as matter as such existing in a pure state, rather matter as seen and being only in relation to form. The third position (matter as treated by modern science) is found in modern science,

⁸⁹ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 43.

⁹⁰ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 45.

⁹¹ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, xiii: Although time does not permit a lengthy treatment of Tresmontant's criticism of the Thomistic/Aristotelian view of form and matter, at times he tends to think that the Aristotelian model has a tendency to split the human person. In his forward to Tresmontant's *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, this is one of the few areas with which John Oesterreicher takes issue. He believes that Tresmontant has not fully grasped the Aristotelian view. He writes "I do not think he is right when he suggests that, though St. Thomas generally upholds the indivisibility of the person, he and Aristotle lean at times towards a dichotomy of man. To speak only of Aristotle, in his *De Anima* the philosopher holds it to be no less sound to say that the soul is angry than, to say that it weaves or builds houses; it is not the soul but the whole man who, thanks to his soul, thinks, learns, and takes pity."

which he equates with the thought of Descartes. He writes, “modern science gives the name of matter to what Aristotle called the sensible. This to Aristotle was composed of ‘matter’ and ‘form’ in a quite different sense.”⁹²

Tresmontant contrasts these positions with Hebrew thought. Matter as an abstract principle is not present within the biblical concept of the world. The realities experienced by the Hebrew people were experienced in the concrete, so that the Aristotelian concepts of matter and form were outside of their worldview. They encountered water, sheep, trees, and men. This anti-dualistic approach would lend itself to a love of the sensible. It is the unique position of Hebrew thought that it both rejects idealism and materialism while embracing certain insights of both. Its ability to hold together the goodness of matter and the intelligibility of the sensible world lend themselves to this task.⁹³

Tresmontant turns once again to the early Christian writers to explicate how Hebrew thought developed into Christian theology and metaphysics. He quotes Tatian who wrote, “matter is not without any external principle, as God is, and, since it is not without such a principle, it has not the same power as God.”⁹⁴ He then quotes Theophilus of Antioch, who criticizes a poem by Hesiod since it contains references to belief in matter as preexisting. He follows this with a critique by Pseudo-Justin who makes explicit the distinction between fashioning and creating. St. Irenaeus is invoked to assert that God not only adds quality to matter, but is itself its cause, bringing it into being. The author of the *Elenchos* rebukes the theory that an eternal chaotic matter was co-opted by God who took half and tamed it while leaving the other half to remain disordered.⁹⁵ He goes on to elicit

⁹² Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 46.

⁹³ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 46-47

⁹⁴ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 47.

⁹⁵ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 47-50.

the aid of Hippolytus, Origen, Methodius of Olympus, Eusebius, Athanasius, and St. Basil, ending with St. Thomas who states, “*solius Dei est creare.*”⁹⁶

Section 7: Evil

The topic of matter leads to a consideration of the principle and cause of evil. Tresmontant states, “matter is not the principle of evil. Matter is created, and is good in its own order. It has not that almost divine dignity, that wicked power, which the Gnostics and Manichaeans attributed to it. We must look elsewhere than in matter and in the many for the principle and cause of evil. Christian thought has made a clear distinction between the problem of evil and the ontology of matter, from the standpoint of reason this is a great advance.”⁹⁷ It is clear that Judeo-Christianity is the champion of the goodness of matter and most especially matter as it concerns man as flesh. Indeed, the origin and principle of evil must be sought elsewhere.

Simply stated, “evil does not come from physical matter, but from man’s freedom.”⁹⁸ After disassociating evil with matter, Tresmontant seeks to explain the metaphysical origin of evil as rooted in a biblical perspective. Because it is rooted in the biblical understanding of creation as good, Christianity comes to develop an explanation that upholds this goodness and yet accounts for the reality of evil. Tresmontant looks to Augustine as the founder of an established and well thought out doctrine of evil, although others such as Gregory of Nyssa held a similar view.⁹⁹ Tresmontant says:

Augustine sets in opposition to Manichaeism the two fundamental principles of Christian metaphysics: 1. God has created all things; 2. Everything

⁹⁶ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 54. A paraphrasing of Thomas. (S.T.1,q.45, art.5).

⁹⁷ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 54-55.

⁹⁸ Tresmontant, *Biblical Metaphysics*, 237.

⁹⁹ Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, 89.

that God has created is very good. Evil things are not by nature. Sin is the result of human freedom; it is man's work (*De Gen. ad litt. Imperf. Liber*, 1,2,3). "Often and indeed nearly always, you, Manichees, ask those whom you try to win over to your heresy, whence comes evil... You ask whence comes evil, and I, for my part, ask you what is evil" (*De moribus ecclesiae cathol. et de moribus Manichaeorum*, 2, 2, 2, 3). When then is it taught in the catholic church that God is the author of all natures and of all substances, it is implied at the same time that God is not the author of evil." What, then, is evil? That which destroys, annihilates, corrupts, created nature. Evil is a corruption, and not a nature. Now corruption does not exist of itself, but in the substance which it corrupts, for the substance is not corruption itself.¹⁰⁰

Tresmontant does not devote much time to the problem of evil. He found his treatment on the goodness of creation to make the point of matter's goodness. If matter is not the cause of evil, what might it be? He finds the answer in human free choice. He writes that if "this freedom is fallible, it is because it is created out of nothing and is not yet stabilized, confirmed, in the ultimate beatitude."¹⁰¹ I will have to turn to his writings on what he calls Fundamental Choice and the Heart of Man to explore this issue more clearly. I will treat this topic in a future section when I consider the metaphysical dimensions of his anthropology.

Section 8: Time

Another dimension of human experience that is crucial is time. Once again, Tresmontant finds deep inter-connections in a proper understanding of creation. Only after having grasped the difference between creation and fabrication can one begin to understand the Judeo-Christian concept of time. Being able to grasp that new things are continually coming into existence allows for a proper discernment of time. "This act of

¹⁰⁰ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 101-102.

¹⁰¹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 54.

creation is the most common, the most universal experimental fact, the richest in metaphysical implications. Something new is brought into being which in no manner existed before. Such is the significance of the concept of *time*. 'Time' is a concept that implies that reality did not appear at once. It means that there is a progressive and incessant creation of new reality. The real is engaged in making itself, little by little it is improvised; it means that something *new* is being engendered continually."¹⁰² In essence, Tresmontant makes explicit the unique concept of time that Judeo-Christianity engenders. As opposed to a cyclical concept of time, he maintains a linear concept of time. This linear view posits an actual beginning, a history marked by points that can be referenced by before and after, and works towards an end.¹⁰³

Time does not truly exist in a pantheistic metaphysics according to Tresmontant. The dispersion of the One in the many is part of the eternal cycle awaiting reabsorption. He describes it as "an aimless, indefinite process, the serpent eating his own tail."¹⁰⁴

One way to compare the differing concepts of time is to investigate three different notions of movement: displacement, cycle, and evolution. Displacement is the type of movement that is the least credible for Tresmontant. The displacement perspective of time he likens to the billiard ball model, as an inorganic chain of happenings. It presents a weak relation of "fabricated objects or of 'things' cut off from the organic whole which engendered them." He considers this type of perspective of time artificial and contributing to a poor understanding of causality and finality.¹⁰⁵ The second type of movement is cyclical. This is the type of movement of most interest to the Greeks. It indicates a con-

¹⁰² Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 17.

¹⁰³ Tresmontant, *Introduction a la Théologie Chrétienne*, 66.

¹⁰⁴ Tresmontant, *Biblical Metaphysics*, 240.

¹⁰⁵ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 23.

ception of time that is generally negative. Aristotle writes that all change “is by its nature an undoing. It is in time that all is engendered and destroyed...One can see that time itself is the cause of destruction rather than of generation.... For change itself is an undoing; it is indeed only by accident a cause of generation and existence.”¹⁰⁶ Finally, there is evolution. He sees this idea of movement as a permanent, positive movement of organic growth. It is a moving forward. It is irreversible.

Tresmontant points out the metaphysical options that exist in relation to time. The choice of one over the other carries with it certain implications. His technique verges on a *reductio ad absurdum*. By proposing alternatives to the Judeo-Christian position, which seem either counter to reason or presents a world view that is disturbing to one’s greatest sensibilities, he leads the reader to the Judeo-Christian perspective by appealing to reason. Logical exposé also serves the purpose of forcing the reader to see how systematic wholes are necessary. He does not permit the reader to cherry-pick comfortable pieces of reality that do not logically stand together systematically.

There is no denying that Hebrew, and subsequently Christian thought, is inextricably tied to time and history. He points out that history has a beginning (*bereschit*) and is moving towards an end (*telos*). As opposed to the Greek notion of degradation and decline, time for the Judeo-Christian is moving towards ascent and victory.¹⁰⁷

He calls on the Fathers and cites Ambrose from his *Hexaemeron*. Ambrose maintains a beginning as mentioned in Genesis. He notes how this crushes any possibility of the world being coeternal with God. A further section elaborates on Ambrose and is very much in line with Tresmontant’s view of continuing creation. He writes, “Ambrose ex-

¹⁰⁶ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 25. He takes the above quote from Aristotle’s *Physics* IV, 222 b.

¹⁰⁷ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 27.

presses, in a picture, his intuition of the nature of time: time implies that the reality is not achieved all in a moment; it implies a progressive creation, a process of ripening.”¹⁰⁸

In order to face the many difficult questions pertaining to a proper understanding of time, Christians needed to provide sufficient answers. Tresmontant writes:

Christianity introduced, indeed, a new conception of time, and of the relations between time and eternity. According to the biblical and Christian view of the world, time is the measure of that irreversible creation which is still taking place today, and which is hastening to its conclusions. Hence time is not, as Plato thought, a changing image of eternity, nor is it, as Plotinus taught, evidence of the fall. Time is the measure of a creation in process of realization. Before creation there was no time. Before creation there was God, who creates in his eternal present, his eternal noontime. We are created in God’s present moment.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, “Time is the measure of a creation in process of realization.” The emphasis placed on process within creation was a large theme in his writings. This focus on process and continued creation was so pronounced that it led one writer to classify him as a proponent of process philosophy¹¹⁰. I believe this assessment incorrect if by process thinker one implies that this process of becoming also applies to God. There is no hard evidence to indicate that this is the case. Even within his emphasis on process, Tresmontant was a firm proponent of the immutability of God.

Section 9: Anthropology

As concerns anthropology, I will follow the thought of Tresmontant on four different levels. The four sections will cover the human soul, human nature, cognition/reason, and the supernatural destiny of human beings.

¹⁰⁸ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁹ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 70.

¹¹⁰ Cudahy, “Claude Tresmontant and Biblical Metaphysics,” 222.

Concerning the soul, there are four main contentions presented by Tresmontant. The first maintains that from the Christian perspective “the soul is not of divine essence; it is not a particle of a modality of the divine substance. It is really created.”¹¹¹ This he posits against Brahmanism, Orphism, Platonism, and Neoplatonism. This rejection of the thought of ancient India and Greece was a defining moment for Christianity. In support of this position, he cites the Council of Toledo¹¹² in 400 A.D., the Council of Braga¹¹³ in 561, and the *Symbolum fidei* of Leo IX in 1053. He quotes Leo IX’s *Symbolum fidei* where he states, “*Animam non esse partem Dei, sed ex nihilo creatam.*”¹¹⁴ These aforementioned councils concern themselves with affirming the creation of the human person in opposition to any form of divine emanation.

The second assertion concerning the soul is that “the soul is not pre-existent to the body” and ... “the living body is the synthesis of the living soul and matter which it unifies and informs.”¹¹⁵ He draws support from the Synod of Constantinople of 543, which states, “if anyone says or thinks that the souls of men pre-exist...let him be anathema.”¹¹⁶ Tresmontant quotes from the Council of Vienne (15th Ecumenical, 1311-1312), which speaks of the soul as the “form” of the body.¹¹⁷ This form unifies the biochemical elements that make up the human person. He stresses the unity of the body/soul composite. He emphasizes that the body is not one substance and the soul another. Instead, the body is an essential component of the one person composed of body and soul, and of a soul created from nothing and brought into existence through the free will of God.

¹¹¹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 79.

¹¹² Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 73. Here Tresmontant refers to Denz, 20.

¹¹³ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 74. Denz, 236.

¹¹⁴ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 75. *Animam non esse partem Dei, sed ex nihilo creatam.*

¹¹⁵ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 79-80.

¹¹⁶ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 74. Denz, 203.

¹¹⁷ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 76. Denz, 481.

His third assertion explains that the origin of the human soul is not the result of a physical process. Neither the father nor the mother transmits the soul. He writes:

The materiality of two cells is not sufficient to account for this real creation of a subject, ontologically distinct from the parents. Orthodox Christian thought, following biblical thought, discerns, in the conception of a child from two cells which come from the parents, a genuine and complete creation which can only have God himself for its author, directly.¹¹⁸

The fourth point is the Christian rejection of Neoplatonic monopsychism. The unique individual soul cannot be reduced to being thought a part or piece of a universal soul.¹¹⁹ He cites the condemnation of this monopsychism by the bishop of Paris, by order of the Pope in the 1270's. Condemned was the position that there was one intellect in all men. "*Quod intellectus omnium hominum est unus et idem numero.*"¹²⁰

Section 10: Human Nature

As concerns the metaphysical anthropology of human nature, Tresmontant addresses three key themes. First is the divine intention to create the human person as embodied. Second is the dignity and goodness of human sexuality. The third pertains to the freedom of the person.

Again, the first assertion stands in contradiction to the Gnostics, Manicheans, Neoplatonists, Origenists and all forms of dualism. The myth of the fallen soul must be discarded and replaced with the Judeo-Christian creation account. That men and women should have bodies was part of the original intention of God, and not an afterthought due to some heavenly infraction by which a soul, existing in heaven, is thrust down and im-

¹¹⁸ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 80-81.

¹¹⁹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 81.

¹²⁰ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 76.

prisoned in a body as punishment for some offense. To illustrate this point, Tresmontant quotes Plato's *Gorgias*, 493a and *Phaedo*, 65d, which speak of the unfortunate lot of the embodied soul. "The body is a tomb... as long as we have our soul kneaded into this evil thing we shall never possess in sufficiency the object of our desire."¹²¹ In contrast he quotes Fr. Teilhard de Chardin who articulates the Christian position, namely, a creature is "material matrix," and is what it is supposed to be according to its own order.¹²²

Pertaining to the second theme of the dignity of sexuality, Tresmontant finds no biblical grounds for thinking that people must consider the sexual act devoid of goodness. As opposed to the traditions of India and certain Greek tendencies of thought, the Judeo-Christian tradition affirms the goodness of the body. Tresmontant notes that these other schools of thought believed that "sexuality and desire are indeed doubly responsible for embodiedness, for the fall of souls in the body. It is by desire that the soul is plunged into the material, and it is procreation which makes blissful souls fall into bodies."¹²³ He says that this negative view of sexuality influenced many Christian thinkers throughout the ages. Among these thinkers are some of the most well regarded theologians. This group includes Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil, St. Jerome and St. Augustine as well as many others. He mentions the well-known, often negative, perception of sexuality one finds in the writings of Augustine. For Augustine the loss of intellectual control, as found in the abandonment experienced in sexual passion, was particularly troubling. Augustine imagined that in the preternatural state, the procreative act would be accom-

¹²¹ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 88.

¹²² Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 86-87.

¹²³ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 87.

plished in a dispassionate and self-controlled manner.¹²⁴ Although Augustine battled the Manicheans, some have argued that his contact with them left some residual effects. This tendency is also present in the other preeminent theologians listed above. Tresmontant asserts that the remarkable thing is “that orthodox thought in its development and in its solemn decisions did not adopt these tendencies, which meanwhile were to be found in some of the most considerable inclinations of the Fathers of the Church.”¹²⁵ Official church teaching clearly condemns the remaining Manichean strains still found in Christianity.

Regarding the third theme of freedom, Tresmontant maintains early orthodox Christian thought remained in agreement. He stresses that the human person is truly free and that this freedom is presupposed for the person to choose to cooperate with God. Without this freedom to cooperate, divinization would not be possible.¹²⁶ Tresmontant illustrates how Augustine establishes the role of freedom as he battled heresy on two fronts. Against the Manicheans, Augustine does not blame matter for the evil that a person does since it is fallen and corrupt. Instead, he holds people responsible since they operate with a true freedom that places the culpability for sin directly upon them. Although matter may provide an opportunity for sin, it requires an act of the will, and the will operates in freedom. Against the Pelagians, Augustine argued for the priority of

¹²⁴ The problem of how to evaluate Augustine’s concerns over an abandonment of one’s intellect in the sexual act was not taken up directly by Tresmontant except by a reestablishing of the goodness of the body and of sexual union as rooted in sacred scripture. It is worth noting in light of the following chapter, that Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body contributes much in this area. His anthropology and theology bring together a picture of human sexuality that allows what he calls a *communio personarum*. The male and female bodies, and their sexual union allow a “personal intimacy of mutual communication in all its radical simplicity and purity.”(see the General audience of December 19, 1979.) This abandonment takes on a new meaning in light of this view of sexual communion of persons as a reflection of Trinitarian love. The total gift of the self to the other could easily include the temporary setting aside the exercise of reason.

¹²⁵ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 88.

¹²⁶ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 111.

grace. Grace, however, always works in harmony with the freedom of the person and never supersedes it.¹²⁷ Tresmontant relies upon both Augustine¹²⁸ and the Council of Trent to establish the role of cooperation in the salvation of the person. Against certain forms of Protestant theology, he cites Trent's repudiation of extrinsic imputation in favor of a regeneration and renewal of the whole person. Although most of the writings of Tresmontant are ecumenical in nature, it is here the concern of Tresmontant to elaborate on the differences found in Catholic and Reformed theologies. He asserts, "perhaps indeed it is at the metaphysical level that decisions are taken which will intervene on the theological plane... 'Original sin', according to Catholic theology, has not altered human nature in its substance (or in its essence); it remains as it was on emerging from the hands of God. It remains beautiful and excellent. What is altered is not human nature itself, but the relations, properly supernatural, between God and man...for the theologies born of the Reformation 'original sin' has altered human nature itself. Human nature is radically corrupted, vitiated, denatured, reduced to impotence, as much from the point of view of understanding as from the point of view of action and freedom."¹²⁹ The Catholic view holds that although sin affects our relationship with God, it has not affected our nature. Human nature remains fundamentally the same even after the fall.¹³⁰

Evil, as we noted in a previous section, proceeds from human freedom, coming from the hearts of individuals. It holds them accountable for the distortions and malevolence that surface within the world. This point concerning the status of human nature is

¹²⁷ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 91.

¹²⁸ St. Augustine defends the role of our cooperation as pertains to our salvation when he states "But He who made you without your consent does not justify you without your consent." William A. Jurgens. *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. III. *Sermon 169*. (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 1979), p.29.

¹²⁹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 95.

¹³⁰ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 97.

immensely important, since it bears heavily on the subsequent development of any Catholic moral theology.

Tresmontant raised the question of what bearing this position would have on the freedom and culpability of a child. As concerns the relationship of the child to God, he says, “the child is not born with the life of God, to which he is called, in him...it must be brought to him...he must in the words of St. Paul and of the Fourth Gospel, consent to a new birth, which will make him a new creature... holiness begins with a breach. Nothing can dispense the child from this personal act of breaking with ‘the world.’”¹³¹ The child, therefore, when at the proper age and maturity (able to exercise the will in freedom and with proper knowledge) is required to leave childish things behind.

In providing balance to the Catholic view of freedom, Tresmontant does insist, along with those in the Reformed tradition, that we are not right with God. Something has gone dramatically wrong which requires correction. In addition, even though our nature has not been destroyed, we are nonetheless in need of serious restoration. Our freedom remains, but it is a freedom that enables one to cooperate with God in a new birth.

Tresmontant notes another important point concerning freedom and human virtue. He draws from St. Irenaeus to affirm that the exercise of the will is an essential component of human goodness. St. Irenaeus taught that nonliving things have an inherent goodness because of their nature. They have no ability to be other than they are. In this way, they carry out their good design. In contrast, God calls each person to exercise his will. "His excellence must be a willed excellence, consented to and the fruit of his choice... man, a creature, must cooperate in his own creation."¹³²

¹³¹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 99-100.

¹³² Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 112.

Section 11: Cognition—Christianity and Reason

The Christian doctrine of reason is united intricately to its ontology and metaphysics. The creative act of God forges a world that testifies to him and reveals him albeit only part. God's natural revelation is available to the intellect without the aid of supernatural assistance. For Tresmontant, this is the meaning of Romans 1:18.

The possibility to attain the natural knowledge of God is open to criticism on two fronts. On the one hand are those who view the body and all matter as evil. Creation in no way reveals God, but the workings of some other being, a principle of evil. On the other hand are those who profess that the corruption of human nature by original sin makes the natural knowledge of God impossible. To put this in perspective, he presents the cumulative thought of the Church in addressing this topic. Tresmontant cites the position of the First Vatican Council that taught that human knowledge is capable of a natural knowledge of God. He notes that this does not mean that all can or have achieved this knowledge. It is possible.¹³³ One central concern for Tresmontant regarding a natural knowledge of God is how it affects an understanding of faith. One must not see faith as a violent intrusion on the human person. The Catholic view insisted on cooperation at the level of faith and concerning justification. Tresmontant writes:

Faith is not a passion endured. It is not the consequence of a breaking in, of a violent supernatural intrusion upon us. Faith is a free [Denz, 1814] and reasonable [Denz, 1790] act, grounded in supernatural reason, but with the co-operation of all the natural powers of man. Faith, both supernatural and rational, is the joint work of the grace of God and human freedom, as is justification.¹³⁴

¹³³ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 120-121.

¹³⁴ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 122.

The preservation of the relationship between faith and reason brings into focus both sides of the equation. Just as faith elevates reason, faith relies on reason as its ground and preserves faith from an irrational fideism. As Tresmontant notes,

...the divinely revealed truth presupposes the natural infallibility or certain authority of the reason in those matters which are within its competence...it is to reason that God speaks, it is of the reason he asks faith, and he does not ask it of it until after he has made it see that it is indeed he who speaks... Therefore, Catholic, Christian thought has explicitly made clear that it comprises a doctrine of reason which is not any doctrine whatsoever, and which is bound up with the whole of the Christian metaphysics.¹³⁵

Tresmontant defends a “rationalism” properly understood, where the goal is to maintain the dignity of the intellect. He cautions, however, that by holding the intellect as if it were self-sufficient, a misguided rationalism closes itself off from revelation since it is beyond its natural grasp. Although much is offered in creation, God is free to offer more than can be known through creation. The supernatural must not be ruled out, but instead the person must maintain a fundamental openness.

Section 12: The “Pneuma”

Tresmontant explores several intriguing dimensions in Christian anthropology that have roots in Hebrew thought. The Hebrew “*ruah*” is translated “*pneuma*” in the Septuagint. According to Tresmontant, the *pneuma* is supernatural, and it allows us to encounter God. Using the thought of Blondel, he states, “man was never in a purely natural state because it might be said that it is his nature to be a link between the created

¹³⁵ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 125-126.

and the Creator. The *pneuma* within him is the immaterial bond by which he is raised up to the personal life of God.”¹³⁶

Tresmontant cautions his readers not to confuse the flesh-spirit conflicts that one finds throughout the New Testament with the body-soul conflicts prevalent in Greek thought. While some may ask if Aristotle and St. Thomas dabble in some form of dualism as they treat matter and form, Tresmontant responds, “‘body’ here is not a *substance*—no more than ‘matter’ is – but merely a *point of view* on that concrete reality, living man. The body is man looked at from a certain angle.”¹³⁷ Tresmontant states that to more accurately express what Christians believe “we must not say: man is composed of a body and a soul; but: the living body that is man is composed of the dust of organic elements, and of soul that informs them.”¹³⁸ In addition, “we should not say that man *has* a soul, but that he *is* a soul; nor consequently that he has a body, but that he *is* a body.”¹³⁹

For Tresmontant it is extremely important to obtain a proper understanding of *pneuma* and its function within the human being. He holds that it is the existence of the *pneuma* within man, which is a participation that allows for the inhabitation of man by God's very own spirit. He draws biblically from three particular Scripture verses, which illustrate the fundamental and essential role that *pneuma* plays within the life of the human person. "My spirit will not always remain in man, for man is but flesh."¹⁴⁰ "You take away their breath (*ruah*), they die and return to dust."¹⁴¹ "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns unto God who gave it."¹⁴² These, among many Old

¹³⁶ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 108.

¹³⁷ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 89.

¹³⁸ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 90.

¹³⁹ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 94.

¹⁴⁰ Job 27:3.

¹⁴¹ Ps. 104:29.

¹⁴² Eccl. 12:7.

Testament quotes, serve to substantiate the central place of the spirit and to establish how our spirit participates in the spirit of God. Without the *pneuma*, men and women are not human beings.

The entire focus on the *pneuma* within man calls him above the biological order to a participation in the spirit of God. Tresmontant contends that flesh and soul comprise what is natural to the human person. Living out exclusively the biological dimension of human life to the exclusion of the spiritual dimension ends in death. It is here that Tresmontant makes known the necessity of a rebirth from above. Simply put, flesh in the biblical sense "is not what Plato called 'the body,' but is man, 'a living soul.'... 'flesh' and 'soul' both stand for natural man."¹⁴³ In a footnote Tresmontant quotes O. Procksch who states that "the soul is the substance into which the spirit comes."¹⁴⁴

Section 13: The Heart

Drawing heavily from Scripture Tresmontant produces an intriguing position pertaining to understanding the place of the heart within a metaphysical anthropology.

"Heart" in the Bible does not, as in our Western tradition, mean the affections, sensibility as opposed to reason. It is rather man's liberty, the center which partakes in the fundamental decisions; in particular, the choice is between knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, understanding and what the prophets call stupidity, foolishness. In the "heart" the strife unfolds, what will decide man's destiny, his very essence: according to the essence he has chosen, and will be judged. For man chooses himself as he wills to be. And this is the justification of the judgment upon him.

For Tresmontant, the heart is the center of fundamental human choosing. Drawing from a vast array of both Old Testament and New Testament texts, Tresmontant pre-

¹⁴³ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 111.

¹⁴⁴ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 110.

sents a scriptural picture that portrays the heart as containing the secret depth of the human person. Contained therein is the duplicity of the heart, which is free to choose evil or good.¹⁴⁵ According to his analysis, the possibility of faith directly relates to understanding, and it is the heart that allows for this understanding. This thesis is analogous in some ways to the issue that is explored in the sphere of moral theology referred to as fundamental option.¹⁴⁶ Tresmontant posits that we begin with a fundamental disposition which originates from our hearts in absolute freedom and determines whether we will achieve understanding or be ground in a willful stupidity.¹⁴⁷ Ultimately, one's faith, or lack thereof, hinges on one's initial disposition of the heart. Without a fundamental openness there is no understanding, without understanding there cannot be faith.

Seen within its pneumatic context, "this relation between God and man that is understanding is established through the inhabitation within man of a supernatural element, *ruah*, the *pneuma*...the biblical conception of understanding is tied to its anthropology, and particularly to its doctrine of the *pneuma*. Understanding, in the Bible, is a spiritual intelligence, *sunesis pneumatikē*."¹⁴⁸ However, this is not fideism. Once again, faith and understanding must be understood within the context of the whole. Tresmontant assures his readers that "nothing is more counter to the biblical theology of faith, and its conception of understanding, than the Cartesian dichotomies between 'natural reason' and 'faith.'"¹⁴⁹ Again, "that spiritual (supernatural) understanding, which is faith, is rooted in the secret recesses of the heart, at the very base of our being. It defines this being's es-

¹⁴⁵ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 120-121.

¹⁴⁶ The similarity exists predominately in relation to how in both cases one's core choice is so much at the center of the human person as to set one in motion towards some final end. All the later choices in some way flow from this early disposition. In both cases, this fundamental disposition can be changed, but the change must take place at the core.

¹⁴⁷ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 122.

¹⁴⁸ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 126.

¹⁴⁹ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 136.

sence, whose main action it is. It is a sign of the fundamental choice, the answer that cannot be constrained.”¹⁵⁰

According to Tresmontant, idolatry remains a spiritual option for the human person. Idolatry consists in a metaphysical error that has the human person attributing and applying to something created that which is rightfully only due to the uniquely uncreated.¹⁵¹ The heart is the battleground in which this war over the fundamental choice concerning faith and disbelief is waged. He notes that it is not only by intellectual and philosophical discussions that one is to be persuaded, but that a discernment of spirits is required, and an increase in grace is needed for a renewal of the heart.¹⁵² He further states in a pointed footnote, “human understanding is dependent on a fundamental choice which defines the very being of man. Man can find reasons to justify this initial choice. This is why, in metaphysics too, there is a place for the discernment of spirits.”¹⁵³

In one final note concerning idolatry, Tresmontant argues that the human intellect when grounded in creation can truly attain knowledge of God. Addressing why it was that this knowledge was achieved in a superlative way among the People of Israel, Tresmontant asserts that it was because, “God has freed his people from slavery to idols and in this way delivered the human intellect from the captivity of nothingness. It is with the People of God that the human intellect has arrived at the fullness and the integrity of its normal exercise.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 138.

¹⁵¹ Tresmontant, *Les Métaphysiques Principales*, 28.

¹⁵² Tresmontant, *Études de Métaphysique Biblique*, 163.

¹⁵³ Tresmontant, *Biblical Metaphysics*, 234.

¹⁵⁴ Tresmontant, *Biblical Metaphysics*, 233.

After affirming the complementary nature of faith with the intellect Tresmontant asserts that there exists a complex integration of the intellect with the heart.¹⁵⁵ He says:

Human intelligence does not “function” with invariable simplicity. The act of the intellect is not dissociable from an assent to truth by our most secret freedom. The refusal to understand, of a lack of understanding, cannot be explained apart from those secret human longings of the heart which are mentioned in the New Testament. Rationality is unattainable without moral conversion, which the Bible calls a “renewing of the heart,” that is to say, of both our freedom and our intelligence, which the New Testament translates as a “renewal of the mind.”¹⁵⁶

Although I have drawn a comparison between fundamental option as found in moral theology and the fundamental choice/disposition discussed by Tresmontant, he maintains that nowhere in biblical thought is an "ethics" to be found. It seems that he aims this comment at preserving the integrity of the whole Judeo-Christian contribution. To think of an ethics outside of the context of a people who live in the presence of the true God, he considers a betrayal. As concerns ethics and its subject matter, "these concepts find their meaning in a world that gravitates about him, whose name is I am. They are integrated into a metaphysics and the theology and cannot be separated from them without losing their substance."¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, this position raises a number of very serious questions. One notable point, if this position is indeed tenable, is that it certainly maintains a firm stance against an ethics isolated from all aspects of created existence. He leaves no doubt that in his mind, the Christian must be absorbed in a universe, a whole, of which ethics is but one part, and from which ethics cannot be extricated. To further establish his point he quotes M. Pohlens' work *Die Stoa* in a footnote:

¹⁵⁵ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 102-103.

¹⁵⁶ Tresmontant, *Toward the Knowledge of God*, 104.

¹⁵⁷ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 129.

The fundamental notions of philosophical ethics are lacking in the New Testament. They are either completely lacking as is the case of *Eudaimonia*, or they appear very rarely, like *aretē* in the epistles of St. Peter and (only once) in the epistles of St. Paul, or again they acquire a new, religious meaning like *dikaïosunē*, a justice that has value in the eyes of God. Conversely, *agapē* which is so essential to Christianity is unknown in pagan thought, even as a word.¹⁵⁸

Although we will need to say more about the possible merits and shortcomings encountered if one embraces this position, once again Tresmontant is convinced of the integrated whole. It is based and has its foundation in the biblical conception of the world, one which is overarching. This conceptual whole contains metaphysical, as well as ethical truths that are distinct to the Judeo-Christian worldview, and can only be properly viewed within this whole.

Section 14: The Supernatural Destiny of the Human Person

The supernatural destiny of the human person stands as the other bookend in the thought of Tresmontant. With creation at the beginning, this final section completes the work begun in creation and looks towards an eternal destination. The destined end of life for the human person is union with God. The work of making the person capable of such a union, *capax Dei*, began in creation and carries forth with the hope of becoming participants in the divine nature. Tresmontant holds that divinization is the completion of what was begun in creation, however, this supernatural call involves metaphysical “implications and presuppositions.” Two essential presuppositions involve the freedom of the one being called and the person’s being preadapted to this end.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 129.

¹⁵⁹ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 109.

As I explained in the treatment on creation, since human beings are not divine emanations, they are ontologically distinct from God. A union exists, although it is not at the level of divinization. In order for this higher level of union to take place, it requires our free consent. Tresmontant asserts, "our divinization is not a state of fact, established from all eternity. Our divinization is a process, a genesis, in which grace is primary, but in which we have to co-operate freely."¹⁶⁰ This interim period for human beings is a necessary part of the process. Human beings are by nature creatures that live in time and progress moment by moment, gaining greater maturity, and by grace progress towards a supernatural destiny. Tresmontant refers to St. Irenaeus. He says:

Irenaeus concludes: "Hence those are thoroughly unreasonable who do not await the time of growth, and blame God for the weakness of their nature." Irenaeus shows how, by an inner and strictly metaphysical necessity, creation is gradual, and, more so, is that divinization which God offers to men.¹⁶¹

Tresmontant contrasts the Christian anthropology with other systems in order to show its unique place in relationship towards this supernatural destiny. For example, in those philosophical systems in which the soul is by its nature a particle of the divine substance, and therefore divine, its natural resting place consists in the re-absorption within the one. For Christianity, on the other hand, the immortality of the individual soul is asserted, but its divinization is only possible through a grace-filled invitation. There is no question of one assuming this place by right. It is the result of adoption. One cannot lay claim to this without the divine initiative.

What Tresmontant asserts is that the Christian metaphysics portrays an extremely optimistic view of the human person. This supernatural destiny is so essential that Tres-

¹⁶⁰ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 106.

¹⁶¹ Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 115-116.

montant contends, "from the ontological point of view, from the standpoint of Christian ontology and anthropology, what defines man precisely is the supernatural destiny offered to him by grace, for which he is preadapted by creation."¹⁶²

Within this view, and included in this destiny, it is the person who is valued, and invited to share in the divine life. It is an invitation-only event, to which all receive an invitation. The invitation itself bears witness to the value of the person, who is recognized, remembered, and called to attend. "Therefore, according to Christian metaphysics, relationships of dialogue exist between the uncreated being and the created beings. The absolute enters into a personal relationship with man, in particular, within the outline of a new humanity -the people of God."¹⁶³

Tresmontant presents a metaphysics, which once fully developed, becomes a system that holds the person in the highest regard. The person is so highly esteemed, and this includes their freedom, that God himself will not impinge on the freedom of the person, even when persons exercise this freedom to their own detriment.

In contrast to this supernatural invitation, Tresmontant presents other philosophical positions that provide metaphysical alternatives. It is his hope to show that these alternative systems are pre-critically accepted although considered philosophically and metaphysically legitimate.

With the doctrine of divinization, we are at the heart of Christian theology; we are in the midst of the revealed supernatural. This must be admitted. It must also be noted that the philosophies most traditionally listed in the history of metaphysical thought - those of Plato, Plotinus, Spinoza, Leibniz, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and many others - also comprise a doctrine of pantheistic divinization...the process is cyclic; it is natural, in the sense that it does not appeal to the supernatural gift, to a grace. This cycle is regarded as being fully entitled to form part of what is called metaphys-

¹⁶² Tresmontant, *The Origins of Christian Philosophy*, 110.

¹⁶³ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 108.

ics. The Platonic, Plotinian, Spinozan, or Hegelian doctrine of the divine, of the soul, of its origin or destiny, is not refused a place in our history of philosophy. Why should Christian doctrine on the same subjects be dismissed from the field of metaphysics? Is it because it is not pantheistic? But should pantheism be *a priori* identifiable with the rational and the philosophic?¹⁶⁴

In many ways, this gets at the heart of the metaphysical argument for Tresmontant. He asks why people call Christianity into question as a legitimate metaphysical system. Those who question its legitimacy do so by claiming that the Christian presuppositions have roots in a revelation that is unachievable through purely rational means, and yet, when analyzed, many of the prevailing philosophical systems operate with an *a priori* acceptance of some form of pantheism. In addition, the possibility of the supernatural revelation cannot be ruled out philosophically. Until it is proven incompatible with reason, if this were possible, then it deserves a fair hearing. It needs to have a place along with other metaphysical systems.

The orthodox Christian tradition, according to Tresmontant, attests to the supernatural destiny of human beings. He believes that the law and the prophets, through the apostles, the Fathers, and the Church Councils, attest to this position.¹⁶⁵ Christian theology clearly trusts in divine adoption, which finds expression in the New Testament. This is clear, as Tresmontant shows, in the marriage imagery found in the writings of St. Paul and other books of the New Testament. New Testament marriage imagery indicates a profound union of Christ with his Church. The language employed speaks of an “already but not yet” union. For the one still en route, this destiny and final union requires fulfillment. The consummation of the marriage requires completion. In evidence of the cen-

¹⁶⁴ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 109-110.

¹⁶⁵ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 111.

trality of this marriage imagery, he posits that both the rabbis and Christian mystics find in the Cantic of Canticles the "central book of the Scriptures."¹⁶⁶

Regarding the Conciliar evidence for this claim, Tresmontant cites the First Vatican Council. From the constitution *De Fide* he quotes, "God, out of his infinite goodness, ordained man to a supernatural end, that is to say to a sharing in the divine estate, which altogether transcends the intelligence of the human mind."¹⁶⁷

In further support of the philosophical legitimacy of the supernatural destiny of the human person, Tresmontant cites the lived experience of people as displaying a natural desire and orientation towards this supernatural end. Found within the human person is a natural desire to see God. Tresmontant admits that this point is debatable but finds evidence for it in the soul of each person. In reality, in actual concrete persons, and in their hearts, minds, will, and inner core, these longings for the infinite seem undeniable. Norris Clarke says this when he speaks of the innate dissatisfaction that each person has in seeking to plummet the depths of reality. Once we fully explore a finite good, we then "rebound" to seek out what is further. Even an infinite exploration of the finite would prove unsatisfying to the intellect given its infinite capacity for knowing being. One can only rest in the infinite.¹⁶⁸

In response to how Christianity can take its place among the many well-established philosophies contained in history in spite of its conviction of a supernatural dimension, Tresmontant answers:

If the Christian supernatural, taught by a revelation and by the Church, finds in man no rationally discoverable correspondence, no touchstone of

¹⁶⁶ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 112

¹⁶⁷ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 113. Denz, 1786

¹⁶⁸ W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The Philosophical Approach to God*, rev. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 14-18.

anticipation, no petition, and presents itself as a superfluous supplement falling on a complete, contented, fulfilled, self-satisfied human nature, then philosophy can question the rational value of this idea of the supernatural for which experience offers no foundation. Then it will be possible to legitimately attempt to establish a separate philosophy. Christianity will remain a metaphysic...but it will not have a rational title. It will be dependent on a gratuitous choice, or philosophically arbitrary preference, instead of on philosophy.¹⁶⁹

The above is precisely what Tresmontant believes is not the case. He claims that on examination human beings do manifest many signs that would give evidence of such a predisposition, natural to the human person, towards a supernatural destiny. Moreover, he holds that these supernatural longings, present in human beings from the dawn of time, have a corresponding fulfillment within Christianity that supersedes all other known philosophical systems. For Tresmontant the supernatural destiny of the person is deeply related to creation. In creation the human person is given the capacity and freedom to choose an end that is a sharing in the very life of God. The person is not “entitled” to this supernatural end as if the person were a divine emanation, but is rather offered this destiny as gift. However, this supernatural end is no foreign intrusion according to Tresmontant, but is the final end for which God destined each creature.

Section 15: Evaluation

A thorough evaluation of Tresmontant's metaphysical thought will be presented after I have placed him in dialogue with thinkers of the greater metaphysical tradition as well as some modern critics of the metaphysical project. For now I will offer some general remarks concerning the strengths and weaknesses of his writings.

¹⁶⁹ Tresmontant, *Christian Metaphysics*, 115.

First, I admire Tresmontant's willingness to address areas that verge on the scientific front. Too often theology and science operate independently of one another with no regard for the findings or achievements of the other. Tresmontant's desire to explore new ways of contemplating ancient mysteries in light of modern scientific techniques is indeed admirable. This is illustrated in his readiness to apply the findings of information theory to the issue of creation. This is also found in his receptivity to new ways of thinking as concerns evolution. Further, his thoughts concerning creation and biological organization, from the center outwards, provides both a powerful point of reflection as well as a way to discuss matter and form which may better congeal with a scientific approach.

On the other hand, I believe that when engaging with certain metaphysical topics one ought to be cautious not to adopt any specific scientific theory as a basis for a metaphysical position. For instance, I think it wise for the philosopher/theologian to continue to maintain the position of creation *ex nihilo* without having to base it specifically on the "Big Bang" or any like hypothesis. As a theory moves more closely to universal recognition, or is even regarded as fact, one may call upon it as an example of how science, for the time being, bears evidence that favors one position or another. I do not believe that Tresmontant relies on any theory to a serious degree, but at times he seems overly enthused with particular scientific findings as they tend towards confirming his position. When this is done I think sufficient caveats are warranted.

As presented in this chapter, the scholarly method of Tresmontant is noteworthy. Employing scripture, logic, comparison, the Fathers and Church Councils is not new to theology, but applying it to metaphysics as he has done is unique. A biblically derived metaphysics is not found in the metaphysical manuals that were used from the scholastic

period until today. Although the thought and teaching of St. Thomas is thoroughly imbued with scripture, he does not begin his metaphysics in this way. For example, in *On Being and Essence*, Thomas begins by citing the insights of Aristotle and Avicenna and then commences with a philosophical treatise of the *meanings* of being and essence.¹⁷⁰

From the Christian perspective the authority of scripture serves as a reliable foundation. The logical exposé illustrates the ramifications of maintaining a consistent system. The elaboration on opposing positions illustrates what they entail. And finally the Early Church Fathers, the Councils and official Church teaching serve to validate the findings. They further indicate that systematically the metaphysics can hold together reflecting an accurate expression of Christian thought. This scriptural approach may possibly carry the added benefit of being ecumenically well received.

From the non-Christian perspective his thought is still valuable as it presents what each philosophical system posits in a clear manner. The logical rigor applied to the axiomatic principles from each philosophy helps to explain what each system practically entails. For example, if you believe this world was crafted by a benevolent God who freely brought you into existence and actively desires your eternal happiness, you will approach reality in a specific way as informed by this world view. If, on the other hand, you believe that what we call this world, containing things and persons, is an illusion, and in fact what you perceive of as “yourself” is also an illusion soon to be swept back into the absolute from whence “you” came, you will surely have a different perspective of life. Such a position further illustrates that what you think of as yourself is not the result of *being as gift*, but is in fact the result of a cosmic play of which you are a small part. That

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1950).

self which you have so long cultivated has been a fantasy and will come to naught. This type of exercise may lead some to take another look at what they accept as foundationally true.

Concerning another topic, I think Tresmontant misspeaks when he insists that what philosophers call “ethics” is nowhere to be found in biblical thought. He is not maintaining that biblical thought lacks a prescribed way of behaving. Even a cursory reading of scripture could provide plenty of examples of biblical texts mandating how human beings ought to conduct themselves. He is however asserting that ethical conduct, according to scripture, is inextricably tied to a relationship with the One True God. Tresmontant adds this clarifying remark. He says, "to reduce this contribution to an “ethics” is in fact nothing less than the betrayal."¹⁷¹ This point is well taken. It emphasizes that the whole of the relationship between God and Israel cannot be simply reduced to a system of ethics. He states this to counter those who would like to reduce Judeo-Christian thought to an ethical system without having to be troubled with a living God. It is well worth considering that Tresmontant has it in mind to counter the thought of Kant who favors an ethics over metaphysics.

Nonetheless, the footnote that he cites indicates that the New Testament contains nothing like the Greek ethical concept of eudaimonia. This is true if one is referring to an ethics of eudaimonia explicitly presented, but questionable if one were to investigate how the ethical teaching contained within Judeo-Christian thought may in fact be an ethics of "fullness of being." It would not be difficult to cultivate a series of passages which speak to this effect. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."¹⁷² "These things I

¹⁷¹ Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, 129.

¹⁷² John 10:10.

have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."¹⁷³ These along with countless other passages could well serve to illustrate a Christian ethics which could employ the concept of eudaimonia. Certainly this is implied in the famous saying of St. Irenaeus that "the glory of God is man fully alive."

Tresmontant would be justified in trying to preserve the integrity of an ethics that is grounded in a relationship with God. However, I think a denial of the possibility of extricating the ethical content contained within scripture can be problematic. This is problematic on two fronts. First, in a pluralistic society this makes it impossible to appeal to any objective standard of behavior. If Christians, inspired by the Scriptures, are unable to enter into an ethical discussion with those who are not biblically based we are in great trouble. This is especially true today when we stand poised on the brink of an ethical clash of cultures. Second, this underestimates any sort of natural law approach which may still offer the most promising means of dialogue between cultures.

It is true that the scriptures do not lay out a systematic natural law approach to ethics, but the question is whether an ethics can be legitimately extracted from it. This indeed is what Tresmontant claims to be doing in the sphere of metaphysics. I believe the same technique which he applies to metaphysics as biblically derived can be fruitfully applied to ethics as well.

Both Cudahy and Cherbonnier emphasize Tresmontant's insistence on the value of the concrete. They do so by contrasting his work with Platonic thought. On some levels I think this justified. For too long an overly heavy emphasis on the more spiritual and the more universal may have detracted from a proper appreciation of the concrete. The Hebrew genius is found in encountering the presence of God as experienced in the con-

¹⁷³ John 15:11.

crete and in an integrated way that did not downplay the body. The so called primitive perspective of the Hebrews may very well present the most advanced metaphysical perspective.

On the other hand I do not find that there is a need to debunk what is sometimes called the classical approach. This classical approach is able to include both the Aristotelian and Platonic contributions, and does so in a way that is able to be reconciled with a metaphysics solely rooted in scripture. In fact, we have been the beneficiaries of a tradition that has purposely included the Aristotelian and the Platonic insights which have been able to aid Christianity. Certainly the Platonic notion of participation proves extremely valuable, and theology on the whole would be the poorer without the thought of St. Thomas and his use of Aristotle.

Finally, I believe that Tresmontant's critique of Kant is deserving of a good deal of consideration. As stated earlier, Kant's failure to recognize the preexisting context of the subject may prove a fatal flaw in his thinking. Tresmontant's assertion that Kant's critique is based on an artificial presupposition which prevents the possibility of his discovery of the Absolute must be addressed. The creation-based perspective of Tresmontant presents new challenges to a philosophy that has sought to cripple the advance of metaphysics.

The intimate bond between theological and philosophical wisdom is one of the Christian tradition's most distinctive treasures in the exploration of revealed truth. This is why I urge them [theologians] to recover and express to the full the metaphysical dimension of truth in order to enter into a demanding critical dialogue with both contemporary philosophical thought and with the philosophical tradition in all its aspects, whether consonant with the word of God or not. *FR* §105

CHAPTER THREE: JOHN PAUL II AND *FIDES ET RATIO*

Section 1: Formative Years

Karol Wojtyła was born on the 18th of May in 1920 in the town of Wadowice, Poland. His mother died early in his childhood and he was then raised by his father, who was a non-commissioned military officer. After high school he enrolled in the Jagiellonian University in Krakow in 1938. His was a short-lived university experience due to the Nazi invasion in 1939 which forced him to discontinue studies. In 1942 he pursued the path to priesthood which entailed seminary study, first underground and then formally after the end of the war. After ordination he was sent to Rome to pursue his doctoral degree at the Angelicum University. He did so under the renowned theologian, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange and completed his doctoral work in 1948. For a few years he was engaged in pastoral work, until in 1951 he resumed his philosophical and theological pursuits. At this time he considered the usefulness of Max Scheler's phenomenology towards the development of a Catholic ethics and defended his thesis on this subject at the Catholic University of Lublin in 1953. Shortly thereafter he was named professor of moral theology at the same university. His subsequent appointment to bishop, archbishop and eventually pope became his major occupation. Nonetheless, he sought to remain in-

volved in academic pursuits for his entire life. His prolific writings as both Pontiff and as a Professor attest to his continued love of academia.

A number of circumstances exerted a significant influence over the writings of John Paul, as we shall refer to him for the remainder of the dissertation. Some of these encounters were more influential than others, but all of them were significant as they provided various elements towards the construction of an entire system of thought. Biographer George Weigel points out that at the very beginning of the future Pope's studies in 1942 he encountered metaphysics textbook which would forever change his vision of the world. This encounter will in great part have substantial bearing on this dissertation's focus on the metaphysical writings of John Paul. Weigel notes how the literature John Paul read in his youth was so vastly different from a textbook that he was asked to master, that he had to strain to grasp this new approach to thought. Weigel quotes how the Pope later explained this new discovery to André Frossard:

My literary training, centered around the humanities, had not prepared me at all for the scholastic theses and formulas with which the manual [Wais's book] was filled. I had to cut a path through a thick undergrowth of concepts, analyses, and axioms without even being able to identify the ground over which I was moving. After two months of hacking through this vegetation I came to a clearing, to the discovery of the deep reasons for what until then I had only lived and felt. When I passed the examination I told my examiner that... the new vision of the world which I had acquired in my struggle with that metaphysics manual was more valuable than the mark which I had obtained. I was not exaggerating. What intuition and sensibility had until then taught me about the world found solid confirmation.¹

This metaphysical illumination would continue to be the foundational underpinning of all of his thought from this initial encounter through his papacy. It would color

¹ George Weigel, "Wojtyla's Walk Among the Philosophers," paper presented at the Proceedings of the Second Annual Fall Conference of the Simon Silverman Center, "The Phenomenology of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II," December 1-2 Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, 2006, 3

and affect all of his subsequent reading. As he engaged modern schools of philosophy he did so with a mind to reconcile them with the insight he received from Wais's manual. According to Cardinal Dulles, this metaphysical text did not just contain the classical approach but allowed him to come to grips with the transcendental philosophy that was currently being discussed. This school of thought coming out of Louvain included the thought of Cardinal Mercier and sought to reconcile the approaches of Thomas Aquinas and Kant. At the end of this course of study, Dulles notes that John Paul "was able to see that reality is intelligible and that an all-embracing realist philosophy is possible."²

John Paul, as his teaching and writings evidence, was not strictly a traditionalist. As he encountered new approaches to philosophy he did not dismiss them if they were seemingly reconcilable with a Catholic world view. Weigel points out that his dissatisfaction with strict neo-scholasticism was manifested in the conflict that he had with Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange over the content in his first dissertation. Weigel notes that his grade suffered as a result of his unwillingness to follow a more conservative course. He writes that his professor "was unhappy that Wojtyla, writing about the concept of faith in St. John of the Cross, did not refer to God as the 'Divine Object'—and docked his grade accordingly. ... He remained a Thomistic realist; but he seems to have been looking for a different method to get at the truth of things."³

His exploration of the thought of St. John of the Cross helped him to expand his understanding of mystical experience. Dulles explains it by saying that John Paul realized that in this type of experience "the presence of God is grasped in a non-objective way,

² Avery Cardinal Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," paper presented at the Proceedings of the Second Annual Fall Conference of the Simon Silverman Center- "The Phenomenology of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II," December 1-2 Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, 2006, 3.

³ Weigel, "Wojtyla's Walk Among the Philosophers," 5.

through the mutual self-giving of two subjects. The insight into the dynamics of intersubjectivity set him on the way to constructing an original personalist form of Thomistic realism.”⁴

For John Paul this would prove to be a life-long challenge, remaining faithful to the Thomistically based metaphysics in which he found the ability to ground his thought and experience while being open to integrate the truth that he found in both the realms of phenomenology and mysticism. His inability to find an adequate means of objective expression for a mystical encounter with God is reminiscent of Thomas’ own mystical experience. This reaction when facing the mystery of the Divine may be considered wholly faithful to Thomas’ own understanding of God who is ultimately beyond our intellectual categories. It is often thought that Thomas gave up on theology after this mystical encounter. However, even with this greater realization of the limited ability that our linguistic and categorical terms provide, Thomas thought his contribution worthwhile enough to continue. Perhaps this affords greater evidence for the breadth of the Thomistic tradition which admits the limited capacity of language and human thought and nonetheless professes its ability to grasp truth.

In John Paul’s pursuit of truth one finds evidence of a particular pattern which centers on the substantial truth to be found over and above its expression. Weigel makes known an interesting piece of evidence regarding the scholarship of John Paul. He writes that he “had a generally ‘unfootnoted’ way of doing philosophy: - he did philosophy ‘like a peasant,’ his premier student later noted – and he was far more concerned with

⁴ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 4-5.

mapping the terrain of things-as-they-are than with providing an extensive academic apparatus of citations and cross-references for every proposal or assertion.”⁵

As noted, John Paul's philosophical foundation was rooted in a realism derived from the thought of both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. It may also help to place this study within the context in which it took place. During the time that he was first studying metaphysics he was also working in a chemical factory and encountering the harsh reality that was a part of that labor while enduring the tragedies of war. It is here, it could be posited, where John Paul's conviction of realism was solidly constructed. In this context the arguments posed by radical skepticism and moral relativism arguably lost their sway.⁶

The unique approach of John Paul was found in his combining of metaphysical realism rooted in Thomas, with a keen awareness of human experience illuminated in the writings of Max Scheler and other phenomenologists.⁷ For my purposes here I think it sufficient to point out how very committed John Paul was to both of these philosophical traditions. He was not wholly satisfied having only encountered the work of Wais, and so continued the study of metaphysics thereafter.⁸

Fides et Ratio, I will argue, is the greatest expression of the philosophical thought of John Paul. Although it can be said that more depth, complexity and further reaching speculative writing can be found in *The Acting Person* or *Love and Responsibility*, I maintain that *Fides et Ratio* represents the condensation of his thought. The metaphysical commitment balanced with phenomenology is presented in its “safest” form. Stripped of

⁵ Weigel, "Wojtyla's Walk Among the Philosophers," 13-14.

⁶ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999), 70-71.

⁷ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 128.

⁸ Tad Szulc, *Pope John Paul II* (New York: Scribner, 1995). 142. Szulc notes that although John Paul was part of the Angelicum, he attended lectures in metaphysics at the Jesuit Gregorian University.

the tentative speculations we have a crystallized account of what the Pontiff believes is worthy of the status of an encyclical letter. By presenting the core of his conviction in this encyclical, he marries his thought with that of the Church. In considering how much the encyclical represents his metaphysical past, Dulles notes that in the document we can find a consistency with all of his writings up till that point.⁹ In this document we find John Paul's deep commitment to both Thomism as well as his commitment to the significance of the contribution of phenomenology. The inclusion of an array of philosophers from varied traditions in §74 attests to the breadth of perspectives the Pope valued. Richard Barrett concurs with the assessment of *Fides et Ratio* as the Pope's most representative work. He writes that in this encyclical "we have, arguably, the most far-reaching and mature contribution of his time and one which justifies his election as a philosopher-pope."¹⁰

Section 2: Introduction to *Fides et Ratio*

I will now address some of the questions that were raised in the first chapter. When John Paul called for a recovery of metaphysics, what exactly is it that the pope had in mind, and why is it needed? These two crucial questions will be the primary focus of this chapter.

Giving context to the Pope's writing, it is appropriate to address the form that he has chosen to use to put forth his teaching. According to Francis Sullivan, the encyclical is a relatively new teaching venue within the church. He writes that it is usually thought that Pope Gregory XVI was the first to use this manner of teaching. It falls under what is

⁹ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 11-12.

¹⁰ Richard Barrett, "The Survival of Reason: Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*," *Blackfriars* 81.955 (September 2000): 360.

considered the pastoral teaching authority of the church. After Pope Gregory many successive popes chose to make use of this means of teaching. Under Pius XII it was established as a standard way for a pontiff to address the Church. The teaching force of the encyclical also grew during this time, although it was never claimed explicitly that it required the submission of the faithful as to an infallible statement. The reverence paid to an encyclical teaching has varied, from strong consent, called for in *Humani generis*, to a theological uncertainty on the part of some theologians in light of *Humanae Vitae*.¹¹ John Paul's continued use of the encyclical seems to have strengthened its position as a normative means of articulating the pastoral teaching authority of the Church. This trend in the ordinary use of the encyclical has been continued in the pontificate of Benedict XVI with his encyclical letters on love and hope.¹²

I will use the official English translation of the encyclical when quoting it throughout this dissertation, but will point out from time to time when this translation has been called into question. One outspoken critic of the translation draws our attention to some problematic English, especially pertaining to the metaphysical focus of this work. Laurence Paul Hemming is not restrained from a critical assessment of the translation when he comments on the "sheer awfulness of the English translation." He refers to one pertinent portion in §49:

At §49 the English tells us "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others." The Latin text has "Suam ipsius philosophiam non exhibet Ecclesia neque quamlibet praelegit peculiarem philosophiam aliarum damno." The sense here is quite different: the English implies that one philosophy could be chosen by the Church from a range of systems: rather like preferring white wine to red for a meal. The implication of the Latin is much sharper: to

¹¹ Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1983) 154-155.

¹² See *Deus Caritas Est* and *Spe Salvi*.

choose one philosophy would be to pronounce a kind of judgment on the others. A quite different inference.¹³

Hemming's pointed insight seems to make better sense of the general tenor of the entire document. For while John Paul is clear as to the Church's openness to philosophical contributions from schools other than Thomism, he is more clear that in order for a philosophical school to be appropriate to the task of aiding Christian thought it must have a metaphysical range.¹⁴

The metaphysical emphasis of the encyclical did not go unnoticed by theologians. In the Pope's reasserting the intellect's ability to grasp reality, John F. X. Knasas notes that in this document "what is striking is the 'metaphysical' character of the Pope's plea. By my count, the word 'metaphysics,' or its equivalent 'philosophy of being,' is mentioned at least twenty three times."¹⁵ It is this emphasis that I wish to draw attention to in the encyclical as each of its sections are assessed.

Timothy Sean Quinn asserts that perhaps the very purpose of the document is to address "the corrosion of any metaphysical basis for human life and thought. Not only does the loss of metaphysics deprive reason of any transcendental foundation. As well, it secures faith's abolition from reason."¹⁶ John Paul later lays out six "isms" that he finds dangerous to both proper reason and faith. All of these six philosophies can be found to originate in modernity and what has become known as the philosophical approach that is rooted in the so called "turn to the subject."

¹³ Laurence Paul Hemming, "Unreasonable Faith," *Blackfriars* 81.955 (September 2000): 389.

¹⁴ *FR* §83.

¹⁵ John F.X. Knasas, "Fides et Ratio and the Twentieth Century Thomistic Revival," *Blackfriars* 81.955 (September 2000): 403.

¹⁶ Timothy Sean Quinn, "Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 177-92.

The potential danger in this subjectivity is well described by Bishop Allen Vigneron:

The fundamental axioms of this Modern world had to do with the autonomy of the self, what is classically referred to as “the turn to subjectivity.” This highlighting of the self was a residue from the creation culture. However, withdrawn out of that context, the self becomes the “anti-creature,” not receiving existence as a created participation in divine Being, but existing over against God, competing with, if not usurping, his ultimacy. And in the name of this newly discovered autonomous self, the force of Christian belief in Western culture is gradually eroded.¹⁷

As noted here, it is not the self in itself that is problematic, it is the self drawn out of its proper context. When rooted in a context of creation, the self can be looked on as a glorious gift, a unique concrete expression of the divine. This is clearly what Tresmontant is looking to achieve in his work, to give a context out of which the self can be properly appreciated. Outside of this context the self tends towards annihilation or a misplaced self-aggrandizement.

The modernist rationalism, which later gave way to what we now call post modernism, was initially an optimistic movement which believed in reason and its ability to arrive at truth. These rationalist thinkers were convinced that once one undertook the study of reality this goal could be achieved, and once having achieved some well-grounded first principles a logically well derived system would result. Metaphysics and moral theory were a part of this optimistic vision. This vision itself, however, presented problems for the Christian believer if it did not include a faith component. After confrontation with the challenges posed by Hume, Mills and others, and as a result of not having achieved the goals thought evidently possible, today this rationalistic optimism is mostly

¹⁷ Bishop Allen Vigneron, "The New Evangelization and the Teaching of Philosophy," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*: 102.

nonexistent.¹⁸ According to Dulles, at this time “the prevailing mood was one of metaphysical agnosticism. ...[T]he rationalist mentality hardly survives today except in the spheres of mathematics, logic, and empirical science.”¹⁹

The doubt cast on reason’s ability led to what John Paul sees as the philosophical impotence of our age. Against a tendency towards a modern fideism in light of a discouraged intellect, the Pope hopes to restore the proper place of reason. The Pontiff hopes to reset the broken wing of reason and reinstate the metaphysical muscle on which that wing relies. Francis J. Selman asserts that “for John Paul II, metaphysics shows us the way out of what he discerns to be the present crisis in modern philosophy, which he says is a crisis in meaning that has resulted from pluralism and the fragmentation of knowledge...metaphysics clearly is the Pope’s means of restoring the unity of knowledge.”²⁰

This unity of vision is found in what the Pope calls a sapiential dimension of philosophy. This return to wisdom provides unity and order, it brings together faith and reason. Reason, rooted in wisdom, helps to order rational truths. This represents well the philosophical tradition where “wisdom, as Aristotle understands it, requires the one who is wise, to be the one who orders all other kinds of truth into their highest form. This is pure *theoria*, so that even *phronesis* (Aquinas’ *prudentia*), when it takes not the prudence of the person, but truth, for its own sake is seen as ordered to *Sophia* itself.”²¹

This quest for wisdom must include a needed metaphysical component according to John Paul. As Dulles notes, “Pope John Paul’s most emphatic endorsement of meta-

¹⁸ Alfred Freddoso, "Fides et Ratio: A 'Radical' Vision of Intellectual Inquiry," *Faith, Scholarship, and Culture in the 21st Century* [Washington D.C.], Catholic University of America Press, American Maritain Association Publications (2002): 23-24.

¹⁹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, 196.

²⁰ Francis J. Selman, "The Recovery of Metaphysics," *Blackfriars* 81.955 (September 2000): 380.

²¹ Hemming, "Unreasonable Faith," 394.

physics is contained in... *Fides et Ratio*, which is in large measure a plea to philosophers to recover the original vocation of philosophy as a search for wisdom.”²² Battista Mondin sums up much of what will be examined in greater detail, namely that the document affirmatively posits two truths that modern scholarship calls into question. The first truth concerns the actual ability of reason to in fact do metaphysics, and the second is that of the necessity of metaphysics for doing good theology.²³ The following section will explore in greater detail what the Pope envisions regarding faith and reason and his rationale behind his call for metaphysical recovery.

Section 3: Pertinent Sections in *Fides et Ratio*

In light of the election of Benedict XVI, it is worth briefly presenting how our present Pontiff weighs in on *Fides et Ratio*. The following quote allows us to assess the importance that he has placed on the document, but more than that, to see the importance he places on a continued discussion of the interaction of faith and reason. He writes:

If I had briefly to sketch the main intention of the encyclical, I would say that it is trying to rehabilitate the question of truth in a world characterized by relativism; it is trying to reinstate it as a rational and scientific task in the situation of modern science, which does indeed look for truths but which to a great extent disqualifies the search for the truth as being unscientific; it is attempting this, because otherwise faith loses the air it breathes. The encyclical is quite simply attempting to give courage for the adventure of truth.²⁴

This desire to address issues pertaining to faith and reason has been a recurring theme in his short pontificate. In his Regensburg Address, Benedict sought to point out what can

²² Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 9.

²³ Battista Mondin, "La Metafisica Dell'essere Nell'Enciclica Fides et Ratio," *Alpha Omega; Rivista Di Filosofia e Teologia Dell'Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum* 3.2 (2000), 273.

²⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004) 184.

be the result of a faith not tied to and properly restrained by reason. It is pertinent to this paper that he, along with John Paul, feels that philosophy is essential in the pursuit of truth within the context of the quest of faith.

Although there is contained within every section of the encyclical material which arguably is tied to metaphysical content, I will for the sake of brevity restrict myself to those sections which most poignantly relate to John Paul's metaphysical focus.

§4

First Principles

Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all. These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. It is as if we had come upon an *implicit philosophy*, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference-point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, *orthós logos*, *recta ratio*.§4

At the very inception of the encyclical, John Paul places our focus on those elements of metaphysics which have been traditionally considered most essential. In §4 he makes mention of how many foundational elements remain constant, even in light of changing times and the increase of knowledge. Among these he notes: the principle of non-contradiction, finality and causality, human beings as free and intelligent and the ca-

capacity of the person to know God-truth-beauty. William Thompson-Uberuaga concurs and elaborates on their necessity when he writes that:

These are “first principles” in the sense that they are not the result of an argument, but the basis upon which any argument might unfold. They are, so to speak, implied in our participation in reality, guiding our ability to meaningfully participate therein.²⁵

The early establishment of these key elements helps to set the shiftless foundation which places in context subsequent sections where he emphasizes dynamic growth and openness to “new” philosophical systems. This insistence on these foundational metaphysical points of departure provides evidence for what Dulles calls John Paul’s principal concern, “to encourage a metaphysical realism.”²⁶ Dulles points out that John Paul is here also paying tribute to the established contributions of Plato and Aristotle who laid the groundwork and brought to light these metaphysical principles.²⁷ In defending how truth cannot be opposed to truth, John Paul reaffirms this same principle of non-contradiction also in §34. His focus on causality attempts to confirm that these underpinnings of reason make thought possible. As Selman points out, “for without the idea of cause there is no intelligible order...intelligence is not explained by natural science, for it is the very condition which makes it possible.”²⁸

²⁵ William Thompson-Uberuaga, *Jesus and the Gospel Movement: Not Afraid to Be Partners* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), Supplement for Chapter Four, 03-04-2007 <<http://www.home.duq.edu/~Thompsonu>>, 20.

²⁶ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 12.

²⁷ Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Can Philosophy Be Christian? The New State of the Question," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. 10.

²⁸ Selman, "The Recovery of Metaphysics," 384.

§5

The Place of Logic

Modern philosophy clearly has the great merit of focusing attention upon man. From this starting-point, human reason with its many questions has developed further its yearning to know more and to know it ever more deeply. ... Yet the positive results achieved must not obscure the fact that reason, in its one-sided concern to investigate human subjectivity, seems to have forgotten that men and women are always called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them. ... It has happened therefore that reason, rather than voicing the human orientation towards truth, has wilted under the weight of so much knowledge and little by little has lost the capacity to lift its gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being. Abandoning the investigation of being, modern philosophical research has concentrated instead upon human knowing. Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned.

... Recent times have seen the rise to prominence of various doctrines which tend to devalue even the truths which had been judged certain. A legitimate plurality of positions has yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid, which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth. Even certain conceptions of life coming from the East betray this lack of confidence, denying truth its exclusive character and assuming that truth reveals itself equally in different doctrines, even if they contradict one another. On this understanding, everything is reduced to opinion; and there is a sense of being adrift. ... With a false modesty, people rest content with partial and provisional truths, no longer seeking to ask radical questions about the meaning and ultimate foundation of human, personal and social existence. In short, the hope that philosophy might be able to provide definitive answers to these questions has dwindled. §5

Section 5 begins with a discussion of modern philosophy and its subjective focus.

After acknowledging the merits of this approach he also offers words of caution, reminding the reader that they must *pursue the truth which is transcendent*. As the subjective focus has shifted attention from ontology to epistemology it has achieved a broad skepticism. John Paul's seeks to reestablish the intellect's ability to know, and to know with

certainty. He begins by reinstating the place of logic. This he does in contrast to particular Eastern forms of thought which call into question the validity of logic itself. John Paul knows very well that without logic, most especially exhibited in the principle of non-contradiction, our utterances carry no more weight than babbling. If the Pope is to ask us to become seekers of truth we must have at least the minimal tools requisite to recognize its existence. Although the pontiff seeks to engage the modern philosophical milieu, he is unwilling to give even an inch at this foundational level. Logic stands.

§22

Scripture and Metaphysical Enquiry

In the first chapter of his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul helps us to appreciate better the depth of insight of the Wisdom literature's reflection. Developing a philosophical argument in popular language, the Apostle declares a profound truth: through all that is created the "eyes of the mind" can come to know God. Through the medium of creatures, God stirs in reason an intuition of his "power" and his "divinity" (cf. *Rom* 1:20). This is to concede to human reason a capacity which seems almost to surpass its natural limitations. Not only is it not restricted to sensory knowledge, from the moment that it can reflect critically upon the data of the senses, but, by discoursing on the data provided by the senses, reason can reach the cause which lies at the origin of all perceptible reality. In philosophical terms, we could say that this important Pauline text affirms the human capacity for metaphysical enquiry.

According to the Apostle, it was part of the original plan of the creation that reason should without difficulty reach beyond the sensory data to the origin of all things: the Creator. But because of the disobedience by which man and woman chose to set themselves in full and absolute autonomy in relation to the One who had created them, this ready access to God the Creator diminished. §22

John Paul did not shy away from the use of Scripture in *Fides et Ratio*, in fact, Scripture is to be found throughout the document when it appropriately illustrates a needed point. Section 22 seeks to give Scriptural support to the intellect's capacity for metaphysical questioning and knowing. The Pauline passage taken from the first chapter

of Romans is used as evidence against a strict Empiricist approach to reason which prematurely limits it to sensory knowledge. An empirical approach would only validate sensory findings without their subsequent transcendence towards ultimate meaning. This type of elaboration on pertinent passages brings forth the philosophical substructure inherent within the Scriptures and is very much in line with the work of Tresmontant.

§28-29

The Human Being as the Seeker of Truth and the Human Heart

Yet, for all that they may evade it, the truth still influences life. Life in fact can never be grounded upon doubt, uncertainty or deceit; such an existence would be threatened constantly by fear and anxiety. One may define the human being, therefore, as *the one who seeks the truth*. §28

These two sections bear upon the metaphysical focus only in a secondary way, but nonetheless warrant attention. In §28 we find a very pointed insight of John Paul on the very definition of a human being. He states that the human being may be defined as “the one who seeks the truth.” This definition heavily influences his metaphysical anthropology. Truth for John Paul is not an illusory thing which purposely evades our grip, but seems graspable and palpable as one reads the encyclical. It is not surprising then that the Pontiff includes truth-seeking within the very definition of a human being.

The thirst for truth is so rooted in the human heart that to be obliged to ignore it would cast our existence into jeopardy. Everyday life shows well enough how each one of us is preoccupied by the pressure of a few fundamental questions and how in the soul of each of us there is at least an outline of the answers. §29

In section §29 he roots this search for truth within the human heart.²⁹ This is also of interest for this paper in so far as it was part of the thesis of Tresmontant. Tresmontant held that it is at the level of the heart that one makes a fundamental decision towards or against an open disposition towards truth. John Paul's focus does not extend to the human heart as the locus of fundamental choice which he does in the *Theology of the Body*, but rather as the *foundation of desire* for truth. Some have commented on the Augustinian influences found within the document.³⁰ The focus in this section would certainly support that case. Most noteworthy is the fact that *truth* and the *heart* are viewed as intricately related, and that this quest for truth is no purely logical and dispassionate pursuit.

§32

The Truth of the Person

In believing, we entrust ourselves to the knowledge acquired by other people. This suggests an important tension. On the one hand, the knowledge acquired through belief can seem an imperfect form of knowledge, to be perfected gradually through personal accumulation of evidence; on the other hand, belief is often humanly richer than mere evidence, because it involves an interpersonal relationship and brings into play not only a person's capacity to know but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others, to enter into a relationship with them which is intimate and enduring.

It should be stressed that the truths sought in this interpersonal relationship are not primarily empirical or philosophical. Rather, what is sought is *the truth of the person*—what the person is and what the person reveals from deep within. Human perfection, then, consists not simply in acquiring an abstract knowledge of the truth, but in a dynamic relationship of faithful self-giving with others. §32

Section 32 provides insight into the more progressive thought of John Paul. Although the document affirms many traditional points, sections such as this make explicit

²⁹ John Paul's "General Audience" of April 1, 1981 provides a fine reflection upon the relationship between truth and purity of heart.

³⁰ Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Faith and Reason: A Note on the New Encyclical," *America* 179.13 (31 October 1998): 7.

the pontiff's commitment to Personalism. He places his focus on the interpersonal dimension of coming to know. He is not seeking to undermine the objective content of truth, but rather is seeking to make explicit that this truth is situated within a personal subjective context. This type of approach has proven to be a fruitful venue for furthering metaphysical reflection. For example, W. Norris Clarke has suggested a similar approach in his paper "The 'We Are' of Interpersonal Dialogue As the Starting Point of Metaphysics." In this work he writes:

To sum up, I am suggesting that the most fruitful starting point of Thomistic metaphysics-in the sense only of the initial paradigm encounter with real being (actually existing being), from which the richest notion of being can be brought to reflective awareness-is neither the "I am" of Descartes, nor the experience of the real but non-personal sensible world, nor the neutral "S is P" of any affirmative true judgment (because embracing indeterminately both real and mental being). It is rather the "We are" of interpersonal dialogue. In a word, the full dimensions of what it means "to be" can be found only in *personal being*, in its *interpersonal manifestation*. Why not start there from the beginning?³¹

This type of thought exhibited by Pope John Paul and Clarke may help to bridge the gap between a traditional scholastic past and a subjectively focused philosophical present.

§39

Encountering Greek Thought

It is clear from history, then, that Christian thinkers were critical in adopting philosophical thought. ...But in the light of Christian Revelation what had signified a generic doctrine about the gods assumed a wholly new meaning, signifying now the reflection undertaken by the believer in order to express *the true doctrine* about God. As it developed, this new Christian thought made use of philosophy, but at the same time tended to distinguish itself clearly from philosophy. History shows how Platonic thought, once adopted by theology, underwent profound changes, especially with regard to concepts such as the immortality of the soul, the divinization of man and the origin of evil. §39

³¹ W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being- God - Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 42.

This section, however brief, contains a couple of statements that should not go unnoticed. John Paul wants to dispel the concerns of some, that by mixing with philosophy, theology will inevitably compromise itself. He notes that from the beginning it was philosophy, in this case Platonic thought, which underwent profound changes in order to aid theology. He mentions three specific philosophical positions that required a very specific Christian perspective: the immortality of the soul, the divinization of human beings and the origin of evil. Tresmontant also sought to point this out in many of his works, and the previous chapter attempted to make explicit the absolutely unique Christian view. It was, and is, philosophy that must be reconciled with revelation, and not vice versa.

§43 and §44

St. Thomas Aquinas

A quite special place in this long development belongs to Saint Thomas, Thomas had the great merit of giving pride of place to the harmony which exists between faith and reason. Both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God, he argued; hence there can be no contradiction between them. §43

Recently the status of Thomism within the continued teaching of the Church has been challenged. Positions range from those who believe that nothing less than Thomistically expressed official teaching is appropriate, to those who believe that the Thomistic mode is outdated and can no longer accommodate modern forms of expression. No matter where one stands in this regard, the fact that Thomism has seen a decline in light of its past exalted status is undeniable. Timothy Sean Quinn attributes the decline of Thomism to forces that were at work since the time of the Enlightenment. It is his contention that, unable to attack church teaching directly, Enlightenment thinkers set out to undermine

the Aristotelian underpinnings of Thomistic thought. He says that, "the philosophers of the Enlightenment thus do not simply provoke a conflict between Athens and Jerusalem. They foment civil war within Athens itself." He goes on to write that their sharpest point of attack was aimed at an Aristotelian understanding of final causality and teleology. He points out that Bacon out-rightly denied final causality and considered the very notion as a human construct. He continues, "the extent to which the new science will do away with final causality as an explanation for the natural order is the extent to which it will remain 'metaphysically neutral,' if not downright hostile to metaphysical inquiry. And metaphysics, by the seventeenth century, had become in effect code for theology, as Bacon's criticism reveals. Liberation from any supernatural order would henceforth require a tandem liberation from a theological natural order."³²

A comparison of the status of Thomism as found in *Aeterni Patris*, *Humani generis* and *Fides et Ratio* reveals this decline in status. Harold E. Ernst puts it thus:

Aeterni Patris insisted on Thomism as the only adequate Catholic philosophy, with a guarded admission that not all philosophical novelty was pernicious. *Humani generis* repeated the requirement of Thomism, though with substantially greater optimism regarding the possibility of its enrichment through critically engaging diverse philosophical approaches. *Fides et ratio* moves still further in this direction by explicitly endorsing a legitimate philosophical pluralism, though still espousing an enriched Thomism as a demonstrably-successful philosophical system for the purposes of Christian theology.³³

It is this type of diminished Thomistic emphasis that makes it difficult to build a case that the Church, at least officially, is interested in restating Thomism. This decision has metaphysical consequences. It is worth noting that whereas Pope Leo XIII called for a renewal

³² Timothy Sean Quinn, "Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, 181-182.

³³ Harold E. Ernst, "New Horizons in Catholic Philosophical Theology: *Fides et Ratio* and the Changed Status of Thomism," *The Heythrop Journal* 47.1 (January 2006): 31-32.

in the thought of Thomas, Pope John Paul II calls for the reinstatement of a “metaphysical element” and a “philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range.”³⁴ It is admittedly hard to pin down John Paul as concerns his commitment to promote a new Thomism. On the one hand he most definitely places this document in the line of teaching consistent with his predecessors, and of his own accord offers lavish praise for Thomas.³⁵ Yet, his commitment to phenomenology and new schools of thought keeps him from placing a more concentrated emphasis on a renewed Thomism. This position may have its roots in the attitude of the Second Vatican Council. Dulles notes that although there are to be found Thomistic elements throughout the documents of the Council, and even at times explicit praise of Thomas, it was not a central focus of the Council.³⁶ By all accounts John Paul’s vision of the future of theology and the Church was at the very heart of the work that took place at the council. As the Second Vatican council was not set upon a Thomistic exclusivity, neither was John Paul.

It should also be mentioned that by the time of the Second Vatican Council Thomism could be referred to by three distinct groups: Aristotelian Thomism, Existential Thomism and Transcendental Thomism.³⁷ This added to the difficulty of a *carte blanche* recommendation of Thomistic pursuits, since one’s choice of “Thomisms” could be directed in substantially different directions.

Conservatively speaking, I believe that two elements of Thomistic thought are undoubtedly contained in the writings of John Paul, including *Fides et Ratio*. These two elements display how Thomas contributed in a substantial way to the thought of John

³⁴ *FR* §83.

³⁵ *FR* §57, 100.

³⁶ Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, ed. 194.

³⁷ John F.X. Knasas, "*Fides et Ratio* and the Twentieth Century Thomistic Revival," 400.

Paul on two important theological stances: 1) an emphasis on a philosophy of Being, and 2) a conviction on the truth of Metaphysical Realism.

This point is well made by John Paul himself as he builds on the foundation laid by Leo XIII. John Paul declares " the philosophy of St. Thomas...is a philosophy of being, that is, of the 'act of existence' (actus essendi) whose transcendental value paves the most direct way to rise to the knowledge of subsisting Being and pure Act, namely to God. On account of this we can even call this philosophy: a philosophy of the proclamation of being, a chant of praise of what exists."³⁸ This emphasis on being can be found throughout the encyclical. In §66 he notes that *being* has truth as its foundation, and in §76 advocates *a philosophy of being*. In §86 he speaks of the person as a privileged locus for *encounter with being* and for metaphysical enquiry. In §90 he cautions that many philosophies reject the *meaningfulness of being*. And in § 97 he posits the necessity of a *philosophy of being* to be adequate to interact with theology.

As was previously mentioned, John Paul was concerned with firmly rooting ethics within a metaphysically sound base. Thomism, he holds, provides the proper metaphysics of being needed in this pursuit. Within this context we are able to see the Thomistic commitments of John Paul. As an example Dulles writes that "in his lectures at Lublin he contended that goodness consists primarily in the objective perfection of actual existence, and only secondarily in that which satisfies the natural aspirations of a particular agent. 'The Aristotelian concept of the good,' he wrote, 'which placed the primary emphasis on teleology, underwent a reconstruction in Thomas' view, which gave priority to

³⁸ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 9. From John Paul II, "Perennial Philosophy of St. Thomas for the Youth of Our Times," *Angelicum* 57 (1980): 136-146, at 140.

the aspect of existence, such that Thomas' concept of the good may properly be called existential."³⁹

The second undeniable element is found in his commitment to *Realism*. Selman clearly articulates this point when he writes, "when the Pope calls for return to metaphysics, he means a realist metaphysics, for he says that philosophy, if it is going to serve theology, must affirm our ability to know the truth, which includes the world around us. Realism is the doctrine that 1) there is an external world, and 2) we can know it."⁴⁰ Dulles, who is one of the most ardent proponents of the metaphysical realism of John Paul, is convinced that the Pope's realist ontology of actual existence is attributable to St. Thomas.⁴¹ He also states that despite the Pope's allowing a plurality of systems, they must share the metaphysical realism of Thomas.⁴²

The ability to grasp what is externally objective is one of the characteristics of realism. In this regard Thomas stands as a supreme model, especially as this ability relies on a comprehension of nature. In dealing with questions of both faith and reason, Michael Sweeney posits that the ability to grasp these truths "presupposes that human reason is capable of attaining metaphysical and ethical truths through its own power, which, in turn implies that there is such a thing as 'nature,' and here we find in *Fides et ratio* another reason to consider Aquinas a 'model.'" He goes on to say that although Thomas is not posited as the only route for grasping the truths of faith and reason, "some concept of nature and some form of metaphysics and objective ethics are presupposed."⁴³

³⁹ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 4-5.

⁴⁰ Selman, "The Recovery of Metaphysics," *Blackfriars* 81.955 (September 2000) 385.

⁴¹ Dulles, "Can Philosophy Be Christian? The New State of the Question," 14.

⁴² Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 2.

⁴³ Michael Sweeney, "The Medievalism of *Fides et Ratio*," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, 170.

Since the “turn to the subject” most of the emphasis on knowing has been focused on epistemological questions. This is not a prevalent focus of Thomistic thought. The Transcendental Thomists, out of a concern to counter a modern wholesale rejection of Aquinas, sought to address this epistemological concern. Richard Barrett comments on the neo-Thomistic starting place of Lonergan as contrasted to the traditional Thomist one:

He [Lonergan] took his point of departure from the epistemological question, “how do we know?” whereas they [the medievals] were convinced Aquinas had it right when he took his starting-point from the metaphysical question “what is the nature of being?” For Aquinas, so they argued, the starting-point was a kind of metaphysical certainty, evidenced from top to bottom in the human family, by the jurist who asked what law was to the peasant who sunk his spade into the topsoil. The peasant did so with a kind of metaphysical certainty, that the world in which he worked was real and not rumbled by metaphysical doubt.⁴⁴

In the debate over whether John Paul is predominantly a Thomist or Phenomenologist, as concerns the above, I believe he sides with Thomas. I am convinced of this for two reasons: first, John Paul reasserts our knowing as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. This is no slight move, and many have thought it ill-advised. The second reason is in his assertion that our phenomenological reflections must be adequately grounded. In both cases the Pope shows his hand. It is not an either or proposition, but where one system must reign, he sides with Thomas. A more complete treatment on John Paul’s reassertion of knowing as *adaequatio* will be conducted in §82 as it most appropriately falls within this section.

As previously noted, *Fides et ratio* does not call for all philosophers to become Thomists, and yet praises Thomas for the “right way of doing philosophy.” Perhaps it is

⁴⁴ Richard Barrett, “The Survival of Reason: Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*,” *Blackfriars* 81.955 (September 2000) 364.

the fear expressed by Aiden Nichols that prevents the Church from a strict promotion of Thomism. The Church must remain open to new philosophical systems if they are adequate conveyers of truth. Nichols cautions that if we are to take these new philosophical systems seriously, they cannot become just an absorption by Thomism.⁴⁵ This is in fact one of the possibilities. If this were to happen, as a new philosophical system discovered revelatory insights, that truth content would be absorbed within the Thomistic system using Thomistic terms etc., but the system of the new philosophy itself could be ignored or discarded. In this way no new systems would be recognized, only portions of "things in themselves," to be added to the Thomistic body. The case may be made that this is in fact the most plausible way to integrate new information and yet safeguard the deposit of faith, but it is not what *Fides et ratio* calls for.

It has been argued by many contemporary Thomists that in order for Thomism to be relevant to contemporary scholarship you must in some manner embrace the turn towards the subject. Notable scholars such as Norris Clarke have endeavored to do just that. In his *The Philosophical Approach to God*, Clarke provides a concise overview of the lacunas of traditional Thomism and advocates a contemporary approach.⁴⁶ Clarke would be among those philosophers who consider Thomism an appropriate *philosophy of being*, meeting the challenge of what John Paul calls for in the encyclical. Clarke contends that Heidegger misread the history of philosophy, and that Thomism is in fact the most pronounced "philosophy of being" available.⁴⁷ The Thomism advocated by Clarke

⁴⁵ Thomas Guarino, "Fides et Ratio: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism," *Theological Studies* 62.4 (December 2001): 681.

⁴⁶ W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The Philosophical Approach to God*, rev. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007) 6-11.

⁴⁷ W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001) 9.

is a Personalist Thomism and seriously takes into account the subjective dimensions of knowing.

As concerns postmodern thought a more detailed treatment will be available in Chapter Four, but suffice it to say, philosophers like Sweeney find that although the thought of Aquinas is compatible with diverse philosophical systems it will not prove compatible with analytical or postmodern philosophy.⁴⁸ Many postmodern thinkers would agree and would opt for a discarding of Thomism by replacing it with new modes of thought.

§46

Nihilism *et al.*

As a result of the crisis of rationalism, what has appeared finally is *nihilism*. As a philosophy of nothingness, it has a certain attraction for people of our time. Its adherents claim that the search is an end in itself, without any hope or possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth. In the nihilist interpretation, life is no more than an occasion for sensations and experiences in which the ephemeral has pride of place. §46

This section explores what John Paul considers the six most dangerous “isms” indicative of our age. Quinn writes that *Fides et ratio* diagnoses a sextet of malaises that by and large emerge in the nineteenth century, in consequence of the Enlightenment: idealism, atheistic humanism, scientific positivism, pragmatism, eclecticism and, finally, nihilism.”⁴⁹ A good part these philosophies are either a cause or outgrowth of metaphysical skepticism. Quinn notes that within scientific positivism there is no room for metaphysics, aesthetics and morals, and pragmatism shares this “metaphysical neutrality.”⁵⁰ In contrast to this pragmatism, Freddoso cites the example of Augustine who moved beyond

⁴⁸ Sweeney, "The Medievalism of *Fides et Ratio*," 169.

⁴⁹ Quinn, "Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical," 184.

⁵⁰ Quinn, "Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical," 185.

pragmatist skepticism towards the possibility of finding truth. He was an example of one in possession of the moral urgency spoken of by John Paul as a requirement for attaining wisdom.⁵¹ The six philosophies at times overlap, but they all lead towards nihilism and the total absurdity of human life. Devoid of a metaphysical base there is no way to anchor thought, and in turn to assert an actual system of values. As Quinn notes:

Nihilistic despair, in turn, encouraged the tendency to seek solace in utilitarian or commercial modes of satisfaction- it encourages a liberalism without conviction. Perhaps the deepest issue that *Fides et ratio* wishes to expose, though, is the corrosion of any metaphysical basis for human life and thought. Not only does the loss of metaphysics deprive reason of any transcendent foundation. As well, it secures faith's abolition from reason.⁵²

The Pope's historical overview of how these systems presented themselves as "new religions" is worthy of consideration. These religions contain within their very structure a metaphysics, although unrecognized. This poor metaphysical structure led to what John Paul called "totalitarian systems which have been disastrous for humanity." It is not a small matter that these disastrous happenings have dissuaded some postmodern thinkers from the pursuit of any metaphysical system of belief whatsoever. In their minds the causal link from metaphysics to the violence of totalitarianism looms large, and can only be avoided by remaining ontologically neutral.

§49—§63

The Church Has No Philosophy of Its Own

The following sections on the intervention of the Church in philosophical matters each contain a point or two which are relevant to our metaphysical concentration. The

⁵¹ Freddoso, Catholic University of America Press, "*Fides et Ratio*: A "Radical" Vision of Intellectual Inquiry," 27.

⁵² Quinn, "Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical," 189.

first and most notable point is found in §49 where John Paul states that “the Church has no philosophy of its own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others.” I noted at the commencement of this section what may rightly be considered a poor translation of this very key passage. The point was made that the Latin does seem to indicate permitting less latitude in the Church’s adoption of systems. David Ruel Foster seems to capture the spirit of John Paul’s document as pertains to this passage. The plurality called for is meant to respect the breadth and depth of the subject matter, not to promote a plurality that infers that this vastness allows nothing definitive to be said. Foster writes:

The pluralism that is appropriate to philosophy and that finds support in the documents of Vatican II is not based on the impossibility of truth but on the impossible richness of truth. A healthy pluralism stems from the depth of being that is never exhausted by our researches. We will never say all there is about love or friendship, but it is true to say that we need friends. The richness of being always leaves us with something more to explore. Our human nature makes misunderstanding possible but does not make understanding impossible.⁵³

I think this a crucial assertion. Foster both recognized the vastness of the subject matter and the respect one must have in not brashly confining it, and at the same time realizes our need to articulate what can indeed be firmly established and built upon.

In the second paragraph of §49 the Pope asserts his dissatisfaction with some systems of modern philosophy. While seeking to recognize the legitimate authority of philosophy to undertake its own task, John Paul insists that the Magisterium is forced to act when a philosophical system undermines truths of revelation. As §50 noted, it is the task of the Magisterium to indicate both philosophical presuppositions and conclusions in-

⁵³ David Ruel Foster, "The Implications of *Fides et Ratio* for Catholic Universities," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, 124.

compatible with revelation. Thomas Guarino says this is true: “because of revelation’s primacy, any particular philosophy must ultimately be congruent with theological teaching.”⁵⁴

§52

Magisterial Intervention

It is not only in recent times that the Magisterium of the Church has intervened to make its mind known with regard to particular philosophical teachings. It is enough to recall, by way of example, the pronouncements made through the centuries concerning theories which argued in favour of the pre-existence of the soul, or concerning the different forms of idolatry and esoteric superstition... §52

This section is concerned with showing how magisterial intervention is not unique in our age, but how the Church has intervened throughout history when it was deemed appropriate. It cites a number of instances, one of which concerns the pre-existence of the soul and the Church’s intervention in the Synod of Constantinople, DS 403. Tresmontant has provided an extended treatment of this issue, asserting the very same point, and his thesis that certain systems are incompatible with Christianity fits in quite well as concerns many of the encyclical’s claims. Tresmontant’s desired end, however, seems to favor the construction of a very specific Christian metaphysics and is by and large uninterested in co-opting portions of other systems.

§55 and §61

The Distrust of Metaphysics

An example of this is the deep-seated distrust of reason which has surfaced in the most recent developments of much of philosophical research, to the point where there is talk at times of “the end of metaphysics.” Philosophy is expected to rest content with more modest tasks such as the

⁵⁴ Guarino, "*Fides et Ratio: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism*," 678.

simple interpretation of facts or an enquiry into restricted fields of human knowing or its structures. §55

In §55 the Pontiff once again notes that the current intellectual climate tends to focus on epistemological issues or to explore a more narrowly focused portion of philosophy to the neglect or abandonment of metaphysics. When John Paul speaks of “the end of metaphysics” he sees well how the climate of skepticism has left some thinking the task of metaphysics too ambitious. In contrasting rationalism and fideism he hopes to point out a middle way which respects the spheres of both faith and reason.

This section contains a short remark by the Pope on the importance of maintaining the traditional philosophical and theological terminology employed by the Church. John Paul cites his predecessor, Pope Pius XII, who warned against abandoning this terminology. Although John Paul does not give lengthy consideration to the maintenance of traditional terminology, he nonetheless could have chosen to omit it without much notice. The fact that he included it seems to me to indicate his perception of a possible problem facing the Church in the future. Without access to a common language, the continuance of a consistent and coherent body of teaching may be rendered difficult if not impossible. He furthers this point in §65 and §66. In §65 he speaks of the need for the theologian to have a mastery over the philosophical content, including whole philosophical systems and the terminology that is used and employed by the Church in its explanation of her teaching. In §66 he elaborates on the *intellectus fidei*, which he says “expounds this truth, not only in grasping the logical and conceptual structure of the propositions in which the Church teaching is framed, but also, indeed primarily, in bringing to light the salvific meaning of these propositions for the individual and for humanity.” Additionally, foot-

note 112 continues to establish the place of traditional philosophical systems and the terminology which they employ.⁵⁵ I will further elaborate on this point in my concluding remarks in chapter five.

His remarks in §61 reiterate how the distrust of reason results in the demise of metaphysics.

There are various reasons for this disenchantment. First, there is the distrust of reason found in much contemporary philosophy, which has largely abandoned metaphysical study of the ultimate human questions in order to concentrate upon problems which are more detailed and restricted, at times even purely formal. §61

At each turn it is the modern dissatisfaction with reason's ability in terms of epistemological certainty that undermines the role of metaphysics. In contrast there are those who believe that the intellect can achieve more than a restricted knowing of peripheral truths that have little bearing on the central concerns of the human person. But regardless, the questions posed by metaphysics do not disappear if one chooses not to engage them. It remains the eight-hundred pound gorilla in the room that no one wishes to address. Those like Clarke ask why we should prematurely dismiss reason's ability to give answers to the questions that most matter. For some, the answers to questions like these can

⁵⁵ Footnote 112 states "It is clear that the Church cannot be tied to any and every passing philosophical system. Nevertheless, those notions and terms which have been developed through common effort by Catholic teachers over the course of the centuries to bring about some understanding of dogma are certainly not based on any such weak foundation. They are based on principles and notions deduced from a true knowledge of created things. In the process of deduction, this knowledge, like a star, gave enlightenment to the human mind through the Church. Hence it is not astonishing that some of these notions have not only been employed by the Ecumenical Councils, but even sanctioned by them, so that it is wrong to depart from them": Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 566-567; cf. International Theological Commission, Document *Interpretationis Problema* (October 1989): *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 11, 2717-2811.

only be found in the area of faith, but to give the intellect no competence of its own, as has been earlier mentioned, leads to serious problems of another nature, namely, a faith devoid of reason.

§62

Philosophical Formation of Priestly Candidates

I wish to repeat clearly that the study of philosophy is fundamental and indispensable to the structure of theological studies and to the formation of candidates for the priesthood. It is not by chance that the curriculum of theological studies is preceded by a time of special study of philosophy. This decision, confirmed by the Fifth Lateran Council, is rooted in the experience which matured through the Middle Ages, when the importance of a constructive harmony of philosophical and theological learning emerged.

§62

John Paul concentrates in this section of the document on a particularly practical application of his philosophical position. He addresses the need for a philosophical underpinning for theological studies, and for the formation of seminarians. Although he briefly presents how this has been the mind of the Church as confirmed by the Fifth Lateran Council onward, he does not address the present situation facing schools of theology as well as seminaries. As this directly touches on the present and future state of metaphysical studies, a few words are in order.

At present there are a diminishing number of college seminaries. Many dioceses, as well as religious orders are asking candidates to consider seminary upon completion of their undergraduate studies. In addition, many of the men who enter seminary today come to this decision during or after college. Oftentimes these men were pursuing, or have pursued to great lengths, other fields of study. Upon entering formation for the priesthood, they are asked to complete a short period of philosophical preparation. It is not unjusti-

fied to ask whether this shorter course of studies provides ample time for true philosophical readiness. This new “Pre-theology” often omits courses, such as metaphysics, which were previously thought necessary. This is more so the case for schools of theology which focus primarily on instructing laypeople. I say more so since the ecclesiastical requirements for seminarians do not apply to laypeople pursuing higher degrees in theology.

With this new state of affairs we stand in danger of having documents the like *Fides et Ratio* rendered incomprehensible in part, or perhaps seen as inconsequential. This is worth noting since a call for metaphysical retrieval could fall on deaf ears. Since many of these pre-theology courses of study do not include a specific course in metaphysics, metaphysical content may be mentioned in courses without the student having had to systematically approach the study. In other words, you may be asking the students, and perhaps younger faculty to appreciate the necessity of something they may feel they have thus far done well enough without.

Much of this will depend on the future course of universities. Whether or not Catholic universities are tied to dioceses and religious orders may determine the future direction of philosophical programs within the universities. In the past, a layman who sought to be competitive with those who received seminary training would have felt an obligation to be versed in the same studies that priests and religious had undertaken, thus including sufficient philosophical preparedness. The future of universities concerning theological training today yet remains to be seen.

§64 through §79

In light of the above the Pope seeks to point out the importance of philosophy and its interaction with theology. He notes the principles and criteria necessary for a proper relationship between the two. I will in the interest of time, as concerns Chapter VI, concentrate only on four sections which most readily pertain to metaphysics.

In §69 the Pope addresses the concern of those who ask whether in light of modern scholarship we should focus on *other fields* of human knowledge and less on philosophy. He responds by placing emphasis on transcending the skepticism that would clip our wings and going beyond the study of the particular to obtain knowledge of the universal. By this he not only highlights the human being's ability to grasp universals in the Platonic way, but also seeks to accentuate how the message of the Gospel is universal. He wants to assert the timelessness of the message as well as the ability of the individual to grasp this "good news." This Gospel message is understandable, even if it be received by different cultures, by those speaking different languages or living in various times and places.

The balance that John Paul wished to reach in §72 is a delicate one. Two decisive points are made. The first is that as the Church marches through time it is to make the most of its encounter with various cultures and share in their wisdom and insights. Specifically, in this section he calls for an exploration of the contribution of India. On this side of the equation he wishes to emphasize an openness. What is asserted is an optimistic assessment of the future, and a belief that the rich diversity present in the world and through time has something positive to offer the work of salvation. This receptiveness establishes a disposition of gratitude for the goods offered by diverse cultures as the Church moves towards the future.

The second point asserts the specificity of salvation history as it has taken place within a certain time and a certain culture. This specific encounter must be seen within the context of divine providence. It is no chance encounter. This point is clearly meant to respond to those who seek to diminish the Greco-Roman heritage which has in great part influenced the first two millennia of the Church's teaching. In commenting on this encounter with Greek thought, Weigel noted that "the synthesis of Greek philosophy and Christian theology in the patristic period taught a wise lesson: human beings can know the true, the good, and the beautiful, even if we can never know them completely. Recovering that sense of confidence, John Paul asserted, is essential to creating a genuine humanism in the third millennium. The path to a wiser, nobler, more humane future runs through the wisdom of the first centuries of encounter between Jerusalem and Athens."⁵⁶

Dulles reads the whole of this section less as an affirmation of the Greco-Roman contribution than as an invitation to further development. He contrasts the view of Vatican I, which spoke of the passing down of tradition in a passively received way, with John Paul's and Vatican II's developmental and more dynamic approach. He writes that "while extolling the merits of the great philosophical tradition that comes down to us from the Greeks, the pope does not see it as a closed chapter. The philosophical tradition, he contends, can be further developed by dialogue with the religious and philosophical traditions of other civilizations, such as those of India, China, and Japan, as well as the traditional cultures of Africa, which are for the most part orally transmitted."⁵⁷

One may here question, in light of the passage by Pope John Paul concerning providential encounter, whether the same prestige should be afforded to *what may be* as

⁵⁶ Weigel, "Wojtyla's Walk Among the Philosophers," 23.

⁵⁷ Dulles, "Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II," 200.

to *what actually has been*. In other words, we are able to see the actual fruits derived from the encounter with Greek thought. From this context the early councils worked out and formulated many crucial teachings in the areas of Christology as well as ecclesial and sacramental theology. Where we go from here has yet to be seen. Whatever the future holds in store will in great part require taking with us the accumulated wisdom which is by and large Greco-Roman in origin.

§74

Philosophers Who Made the List

The fruitfulness of this relationship is confirmed by the experience of great Christian theologians who also distinguished themselves as great philosophers, ... We see the same fruitful relationship between philosophy and the word of God in the courageous research pursued by more recent thinkers, among whom I gladly mention, in a Western context, figures such as John Henry Newman, Antonio Rosmini, Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson and Edith Stein and, in an Eastern context, eminent scholars such as Vladimir S. Soloviev, Pavel A. Florensky, Petr Chaadaev and Vladimir N. Lossky. Obviously other names could be cited; and in referring to these I intend not to endorse every aspect of their thought, but simply to offer significant examples of a process of philosophical enquiry which was enriched by engaging the data of faith. §74

The importance of this section in regard to metaphysics lies in the significance of those philosophers and theologians mentioned or not mentioned in the document. Is this list indicative of the Pope's proclivities, or should we look elsewhere for an indication of the philosophical approbation of John Paul?

There are some like Dulles who are surprised that the name of Maurice Blondel does not appear in the document. He footnotes a possible explanation provided in an article by Peter Henrici. Henrici was of the opinion that John Paul avoided using Blondel's name because the Pope's thought concerning the analysis of immanence was so close to

Blondel's that he feared naming him would canonize his thought. Dulles contends the same may have been true for De Lubac as well.⁵⁸ If this is in fact the case, then not being mentioned in some instances speaks more highly of the unmentioned than for the named. There has been ample speculation as to the reasons behind the Pope's choices.

The inclusion of Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson and the exclusion of any Thomists from the Transcendentalist camp raises some questions. To make this more pointed, let us consider Gilson. Since he is among those mentioned in the document, how much does it imply John Paul's concurrence with his philosophical system? Steven Baldner thinks that although John Paul adopted some of Gilson's terminology this in no way indicates his buying into the entire philosophical approach of Gilson.⁵⁹ Others, like Knasas, believe that the Pope's preference for Existential Thomism is more pronounced and can be deduced from other sections of the document. In making his case Knasas does not think the issue of name recognition in §74 worthy of mention. Instead, he focuses on a specific point present in Existential Thomism, and believes that John Paul is making a decisive move by the use of Thomistic teaching. He writes that "the Pope's concern with the specific Thomistic doctrine of *actus essendi*, or *esse*, is patent. Through this *actus essendi* understanding of what is meant by the existence of a thing, Aquinas' philosophy is so open to all of reality that the human intellect comes to know God." He goes on to assert the "Pope's clear preference is for the Existential Thomism camp" even in the face of a few arguments contained in the encyclical which can be leveled against this position. He further mentions that despite the encyclical's insistence on the Church's not having a

⁵⁸ Dulles, "Faith and Reason: From Vatican I to John Paul II," 203-204.

⁵⁹ Steven Baldner, "Christian Philosophy, Etienne Gilson and *Fides et Ratio*," Jacques Maritain Center : Thomist Institute, 16-23 July 1999, 20 February 2007
<www2.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/ti99/baldner.htm>.

single philosophy (§49), its claim that no historical form of philosophy can embrace the totality of truth (§51) and the fact that the Church has never demanded adherence to Thomism, John Paul is on a crucial point advocating Existential Thomism. He continues:

Hence, among encyclicals enjoining intellectuals to study Aquinas, *Fides et Ratio* stands out for one reason. Though singling out Aquinas for strong Papal endorsement, previous encyclicals hardly, if ever, singled out specific points of Thomistic doctrine. Rather, they confined themselves to offering Aquinas as a general model or an ideal case, of how Catholic intellectuals should try, to do “the kind” of thing that Aquinas did, though not necessarily what he did. Hence proponents of Teilhard de Chardin and of Liberation Theology in their attempts to harmonize faith and science or faith and politics could all claim to be following the recommendations of the Church to do “the kind” of thing done so exemplarily by Aquinas. *Fides et Ratio* breaks the mould of these past Papal encyclicals. John Paul recommends the study of a specific point of Thomist doctrine. His clear preference and recommendation is that the *actus essendi* discovery of the twentieth century Thomistic scholarship and its development in Existential Thomism be not eclipsed from philosophical discussion at century’s end. In this manner *Fides et Ratio* continues the Thomistic Revival into the twenty first century.⁶⁰

Here we find a point in need of further discussion in relation to the divergent starting places and approaches to theology now present. Some of this will be considered in light of Tresmontant and the post-modern thinkers of the next chapter.

In continuing to comment on the “named” philosophers of *Fides et Ratio*, Fergus Kerr thinks the Pope’s “list” so random and eclectic as to not even warrant serious criticism. He questions a fair number of the choices made by the Pontiff, most notably that of Peter Chaadev, who he points out, does not even make his way into the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. He criticizes the Pope’s rationale and thinks this list clearly irrelevant. He writes that “it is hard to believe that this mishmash of Hegelian pantheism and neo-Gnostic sophiology, however innovative and challenging, constitutes a particu-

⁶⁰ Knasas, "Fides et Ratio and the Twentieth Century Thomistic Revival," 406-407.

larly convincing paradigm of a ‘fruitful relationship between philosophy and the word of God.’” He concludes that “a document that hails Chaadev as an eminent scholar, and never actually names Blondel, offers too random a history of modern Christian thought to warrant this kind of criticism.”⁶¹

§76

John Paul II on “Christian Philosophy”

Christian philosophy therefore has two aspects. The first is subjective, in the sense that faith purifies reason. As a theological virtue, faith liberates reason from presumption, the typical temptation of the philosopher. Saint Paul, the Fathers of the Church and, closer to our own time, philosophers such as Pascal and Kierkegaard reproached such presumption. The philosopher who learns humility will also find courage to tackle questions which are difficult to resolve if the data of Revelation are ignored—for example, the problem of evil and suffering, the personal nature of God and the question of the meaning of life or, more directly, the radical metaphysical question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”.

The second aspect of Christian philosophy is objective, in the sense that it concerns content. Revelation clearly proposes certain truths which might never have been discovered by reason unaided, although they are not of themselves inaccessible to reason. Among these truths is the notion of a free and personal God who is the Creator of the world, a truth which has been so crucial for the development of philosophical thinking, especially the philosophy of being. §76

Since the question of a Christian Philosophy, specifically, a Christian Metaphysics has been taken up in the first chapter, this section will help indicate where John Paul stands concerning this issue. He begins by limiting the question. He considers the term “Christian Philosophy” under two headings: subjective and objective. Under the *subjective aspect* falls the affect of Christianity on the individual and its subsequent consequences. While John Paul does not go into detail, it is implied that this subjective benefit is derived from a personal holiness. Once again Thomas comes to mind. It is purported

⁶¹ Fergus Kerr, "Comment: *Fides et Ratio*," *Blackfriars* 81.955 (September 2000): 359.

that Thomas himself admitted that he learned more on his knees before the crucifix than through his studies. Not only Thomas, but a sizable number of the best thinkers in the Christian tradition were also models of holiness. One can easily call to mind a myriad of saintly Church Fathers and Doctors, St. Bonaventure, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Ignatius Loyola etc., to name only a few. John Paul believes that a disposition of humility, derived from this subjective aspect of Christian Philosophy is what may lead the philosophical inquisitor to *the radical metaphysical question*, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” It must be clearly admitted that John Paul’s position concerning this subjective benefit might not be easily granted by the non-Christian philosophers.

In the second category is the *objective aspect*. Included in this category are truths of the faith accessible to reason but not always arrived at without the aid of faith. The list of truths arrived at in this way includes: sin, the person as spiritual, the Christian proclamation of human dignity, freedom etc.. Many of these topics were also taken up by Tresmontant as derived from a Judeo-Christian perspective. In line with the work of Tresmontant, John Paul mentions the need to “explore the rationality of certain truths expressed in Sacred Scripture, such as the possibility of man’s supernatural vocation and original sin itself.” Arguably, a number of intellectual positions which were once only accepted by faith have come to the surface as now credible and verifiable by reason. This would be the case, for instance, in the Judeo-Christian belief in creation ex nihilo. The general scientific consensus today favors some type of “Big Bang” cosmology. This is arguably a commendation of the type of work undertaken by Tresmontant.

Sweeney notes that John Paul's assessment of Christian philosophy in large part follows the thought of Aquinas. Sweeney explains the document's two levels of meaning as relates to the term Christian Philosophy. The first level pertains to revealed truths achievable by reason, noting that faith can "indirectly or externally guide philosophy." The second level "points to *where* revelation and philosophy meet. Aquinas is important here insofar as he exemplifies the necessity of explaining these revealed truths accessible to reason through nature, metaphysics and ethics.⁶² He goes on to say that it is this second level of meaning that brings about the most difficult questions, the ones that pertain to metaphysics. These questions include the existence of God, creation *ex nihilo* and the immortality of the soul. Sweeney asks, "how do we know *where* revelation and philosophy meet? Why should they meet in metaphysics? Why not merely in ethics, or solely in the area of hermeneutics and language?" His answer comes from the document itself. He writes, "One answer to this question that we can find in *Fides et ratio* is the way that it uses the history of philosophy. The modern failure to look for a union between faith and reason in metaphysics, it is argued, has led not only to the separation of faith and reason, and not only to the diminishment of theology, but to the impoverishment of philosophy."⁶³

Chapter VII §80 through §99

The following chapter contains many of the core assertions of John Paul and his call to "recover and express to the full the metaphysical dimension of truth." §105 As it is dense in content I will once again attempt to explore only those portions most directly tied to the issue of metaphysics.

⁶² Sweeney, "The Medievalism of *Fides et Ratio*," 174.

⁶³ Sweeney, "The Medievalism of *Fides et Ratio*," 175.

§80

The Place of Sacred Scripture

This section is important in as much as it provides a point of convergence between John Paul's vision of philosophy and the work of Claude Tresmontant. The first sentence of this section could be derived from the very thesis of Tresmontant himself: "In sacred Scripture are found elements, both implicit and explicit, which allow a vision of the human being and the world which has exceptional philosophical density." Out of this context, the Pope says, comes an awareness of God as absolute, man as *imago Dei*, the freedom of the person, creation, the immortality of the human spirit and the sinfulness of human beings. In light of the preceding chapter one can see the Pope making many of the same assertions that were made by Tresmontant. John Paul then concludes by connecting this "philosophy" found in the Bible with its culmination in the "mystery of the Incarnation."

§81

A Crisis of Meaning and the Sapiential Dimension

This section begins by describing our current climate as experiencing a "crisis of meaning." Many of the contemporary modes of thinking have not aided us, but have resulted in skepticism, indifference and nihilism. Reason has been reduced to purely a practical instrument no longer thought capable of finding truth. In light of this situation John Paul enumerates three requirements necessary for any philosophy that seeks to be congruent with the word of God. The first is found in this section, §81, where he says philosophy must recover its *sapiential dimension*. As the word of God is especially able to elucidate the destiny of all people, it invites philosophy to contemplate this destiny.

Adaequatio Rei et Intellectus

Yet this sapiential function could not be performed by a philosophy which was not itself a true and authentic knowledge, addressed, that is, not only to particular and subordinate aspects of reality—functional, formal or utilitarian—but to its total and definitive truth, to the very being of the object which is known. This prompts a second requirement: that philosophy verify the human capacity to *know the truth*, to come to a knowledge which can reach objective truth by means of that *adaequatio rei et intellectus* to which the Scholastic Doctors referred.⁽⁹⁹⁾ This requirement, proper to faith, was explicitly reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council: “Intelligence is not confined to observable data alone. It can with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable, though in consequence of sin that certitude is partially obscured and weakened.” §82

In §82 John Paul lays out the second philosophical requirement, that it “verify the human capacity to *know the truth*, to come to a knowledge which can reach objective truth by means of that *adaequatio rei et intellectus* to which the Scholastic Doctors referred.” The scholastic Doctors referred to are St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure. There are two points of interest to note before returning to discuss *adaequatio*. The first is that John Paul limits the extent to which one can adopt a phenomenological philosophy, as he considers it in its radical form incompatible with the Word of God. The second point is that he once again speaks of ontological content (metaphysical) contained in the Old and New Testaments.

The use of *adaequatio* is not easily passed over. This section follows up on §43 and §44 where the question of John Paul’s primary leanings, pertaining to phenomenology and Thomism, as addressed. The Pope’s choice of an *adaequatio* understanding of knowledge says much in favor of his faithfulness to Thomas. Hemming notes that it is Thomas himself who “to a certain degree codifies and invents the correspondence theory

of truth.” He goes on to say that “Inasmuch as he argues that the truth of every thing is given by a correspondence between thing and the mind (“truth is the adequation [correspondence] of the thing and [its] intellection”) he can do so only because for him everything is *already* perfectly intellected and known by God *before* it can be known by us. To know something to be true, therefore, is to bring my mind *naturaliter* into conformity with the intellect of God.”⁶⁴ He further states that Thomas explains that the very name *mind* is derived from measuring. “What does the mind measure? The adequation of *intellectus* and thing- the definition of truth. The mind measures truth. However the measuring and the intellection are one. *Intellectus*, he says is the power or faculty of measuring that the mind itself is.”⁶⁵ John Paul’s choice of using this description of knowing is both controversial and telling.⁶⁶ The Pope quotes a passage from *Gaudium et Spes*⁶⁷ affirming that the intellect is capable of attaining reality, but it does not specify its taking place through the *adaequatio* of Thomas.

In this section, John Paul begins by drawing attention to the sapiential function of philosophy before moving on to discuss *adaequatio*. Hemming describes how they are joined:

St. Thomas, although he holds [the correspondence] view of truth, has an entirely rounded view of wisdom, *sapiential*, or *Sophia* which he derives

⁶⁴ Hemming, "Unreasonable Faith," 393. Hemming takes his quote from Thomas' *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, Q. 1 a 2, "Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus."

⁶⁵ Hemming, "Unreasonable Faith," 396, *De Veritate*, Q. 10, a. 1. resp. Hemming goes on to argue that for Thomas, this capacity of knowing the truth is directly tied to *sapientia* which he calls highest truth. This insight ties in very well with *Fides et Ratio* and John Paul's theme of recovering philosophy's sapiential dimension.

⁶⁶ Selman, "The Recovery of Metaphysics," 387. Selman provides an overview of the division within the realists. He points out that they do not all agree with the correspondence theory of knowing. He notes that where John Haldane would stand with Thomas, others, like John Searle have a different concept of realism. "Realism for Searle means that the world exists independently of my representations of it. It does not mean that we know *how* things exist but only *that* there is a way that they are which is logically independent of the mind....On Searle's view, the world may be constructed from language, just as it was from our ideas for Kant."

⁶⁷ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 15.

from Aristotle. Here wisdom, as the highest of Aristotle's five grades of truth, is synonymous with "intellectus"- intellection of understanding as such. Now because Aquinas has decided that God already is "highest", 'best', 'most perfect' of all that is in whatever is insofar as it is (Aquinas explicitly does not think God is *the* highest being, but rather is *highest* being. God is not *a* being for him) then to ascribe the highest truth to God is to ascribe wisdom to God. When Aristotle says wisdom is the highest or best, *noein, intellectus*, St. Thomas takes this to be properly ascribed to God.⁶⁸

The sapiential dimension referred to in this section is intended to address a lacuna within contemporary culture. Freddoso points out what John Paul thinks will occur when this wisdom factor is missing. The Pope "explicitly ties the absence of the cognitive dimension of faith to the 'technocratic logic' that dominates formerly Christian cultures in which economic and technological innovations now take place in what we might aptly call a 'sapiential vacuum' with no systematic advertence to the transcendent metaphysical and moral questions that such innovations should occasion."⁶⁹

§83

Theology and the Genuinely Metaphysical Range and Need for Metaphysics

The two requirements already stipulated imply a third: the need for a philosophy of *genuinely metaphysical* range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth. This requirement is implicit in sapiential and analytical knowledge alike; and in particular it is a requirement for knowing the moral good, which has its ultimate foundation in the Supreme Good, God himself. Here I do not mean to speak of metaphysics in the sense of a specific school or a particular historical current of thought. I want only to state that reality and truth do transcend the factual and the empirical, and to vindicate the human being's capacity to know this transcendent and metaphysical dimension in a way that is true and certain, albeit imperfect and analogical. In this sense, metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of

⁶⁸ Hemming, "Unreasonable Faith," 393.

⁶⁹ Freddoso, Catholic University of America Press, "*Fides et Ratio*: A "Radical" Vision of Intellectual Inquiry," 16.

their spiritual nature. In a special way, the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical enquiry.

Wherever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them: in truth, in beauty, in moral values, in other persons, in being itself, in God. We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being's interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises. Therefore, a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation.

The word of God refers constantly to things which transcend human experience and even human thought; but this "mystery" could not be revealed, nor could theology render it in some way intelligible, (102) were human knowledge limited strictly to the world of sense experience. Metaphysics thus plays an essential role of mediation in theological research. A theology without a metaphysical horizon could not move beyond an analysis of religious experience, nor would it allow the *intellectus fidei* to give a coherent account of the universal and transcendent value of revealed truth.

If I insist so strongly on the metaphysical element, it is because I am convinced that it is the path to be taken in order to move beyond the crisis pervading large sectors of philosophy at the moment, and thus to correct certain mistaken modes of behaviour now widespread in our society. §83

This section, more than any other, focuses on metaphysics. If the Pope would have stopped at saying that a philosophy "of a genuinely metaphysical range" was necessary, we could conclude that what he was calling for is a philosophy that is broad and able to ask and give answer to questions that are transcendental in nature. This would have been vague and open to any number of systems, some like those offered by post—modern thinkers, like Marion, that are able to handle larger issues (such as a treatment of creation) but attempt to do so without metaphysics proper. However, John Paul speaks specifically of the need for metaphysics, only softening this call slightly by the qualification that no "specific school" is required.

Although Thomas is not mentioned here by name, Lluís Clavell comments on this section by saying that those who know the philosophical and theological itinerary of the Pope recognize his personal experience in the study of Thomas in some of the formulations on the necessity of a philosophy with an authentically metaphysical scope. He points out the passage where the person is noted as a “privileged locus for the encounter with being” as one such example that hints of Thomas.⁷⁰

John Paul repeatedly explains the rationale for his metaphysical insistence by drawing attention to the consequences of metaphysical neglect. “A theology without a metaphysical horizon could not move beyond an analysis of religious experience.” In his plea that we go beyond experience to the foundation, Barrett claims that he is not addressing his remarks to empiricists only: “this passage is directed to theologians as well as philosophers. There have been schools of theology in the post-conciliar period who have aped the empiricists rejection of metaphysics.”⁷¹

Barrett goes on to point out some interesting implications resulting from John Paul’s comments. The Pope draws attention to what is lacking in a system which places too heavy an emphasis on the subjective without recourse to the metaphysical dimension. Barrett notes that this faulty system would not “allow that *intellectus fidei* to give a coherent account of the universal and transcendental value of revealed truth,” and says that “one could also see this statement of the encyclical as a rebuke of Transcendental Thomism. It seems to suggest that it is not enough to reconfigure a faulty epistemological structure in order to provide a foundation for theologians, there must be a serious adscription

⁷⁰ Lluís Clavell, “El Pensamiento de Santo Tomás de Aquino en la Encíclica *Fides et Ratio*,” *Tópicos; Revista de Filosofía* 19 (2000) 44.

⁷¹ Barrett, “The Survival of Reason: Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*,” 367.

to the entire objective super-structure of metaphysics, old or new.”⁷² Barrett may be correct, but the document in no way clearly comes out against Transcendental Thomism. One may counter that when in §86 the Pope speaks of “the person as a privileged locus for *encounter with being*” he is indicating a friendliness towards Transcendental Thomism. At most one may see in this move a desire to warn philosophers and theologians to evaluate whether a considered system is honestly able to bear the weight of revelation.

§84

Hermeneutics

The importance of metaphysics becomes still more evident if we consider current developments in hermeneutics and the analysis of language. §84

No treatment of philosophy in general and metaphysics specifically would be complete without addressing hermeneutics (the study of the methodological principles of interpretation) and linguistic analysis. Without establishing language’s ability to actually convey truth, John Paul would render his entire project problematic. In not securing this capacity of language his entire structure could be chopped off at the legs. The metaphysical project requires that we believe that language can convey actual meaning and that true discourse can take place. John Paul qualifies the assertion that language is able to “express divine and transcendent reality in a universal way” by mentioning the meaningfulness of the analogical dimension of language. Without going into great detail, the Pope does wish to acknowledge that the work recently undertaken in the area of linguistics must be well considered, and its worthwhile findings need to be incorporated. This linguistic contribution can in no way, however, render language meaningless. If language were rendered meaningless, then even the arguments offered by linguists themselves

⁷² Barrett, "The Survival of Reason: Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*," 368.

would likewise be incomprehensible. This insistence on the actual meaning of language not only affects the work carried out in metaphysics, but has bearing on theology as a whole.

§95 and §96

Linguistics

Continuing his effort to free language from the bonds of a post-modern attempt to render it wholly time-conditioned, John Paul calls for the use of “a hermeneutic open to the appeal of metaphysics.” (§95) Here again, it is to metaphysics that the Pope looks for answers. He goes on in the following section to claim that the ability of language extends to Conciliar definitions. The point being made is how it is impossible to imagine the Church proclaiming a message so time-conditioned that it is rendered incomprehensible. There would be nothing to pass on, and no *unity in truth* around which to gather. The very existence of the Church and of a coherent doctrine that has survived the test of time dismantles the radical historicist claim. Once again the Pope’s approach is not an either/or, but a both/and.

On the other hand, John Paul admits that time, history and linguistics play into how we understand the message of faith in its formulations. Guarino comments on this section by stating:

Two points need to be made here: (1) the encyclical recognizes that one must ultimately reconcile the sociocultural limitations of particular formulations within the universality of truth, and (2) an appropriate hermeneutical theory must be able to employ metaphysics, at least in some broad and commodious sense.

And in light of the 1989 statement by the International Theological Commission, “On the Interpretation of Dogmas,” he writes:

The truth of revelation transmitted in the *paradosis* of the church is universally valid and unchangeable in substance (A.II.1). ...In a statement replete with implications for hermeneutical theory, the commission observes that while development of dogma certainly takes place, “the development occurs within the same sense and meaning (*eodem sensu eademque sententia*). Thus, the council [Vatican I] taught that in the case of dogmas, the meaning must be continually adhered to which was once set forth by the church” (B.II.1). At the same time the commission is well aware that its accent on doctrinal objectivity and universality must necessarily be balanced with the fact that all truth comes to language only within history.⁷³

Guarino’s interjections hope to remind the reader of the encyclical of the necessary balance that is required. The quotation offered by the ITC is meant to hold both of the essential truths in this balance. The challenge offered by an unchanging truth in a changing world, or a unified content being offered in a plurality of forms, remains a perennial one.

§97, §105, §106, and §108

Other Brief Notes

Some commentators on *Fides et Ratio* have found in the statements of §97 the crux of the message both as pertains to John Paul’s proclivities regarding Thomas, and to the more specific metaphysical direction he advocates. According to the Pope, the *intellectus fidei* “must turn to the philosophy of being.” I am convinced the word “must” was carefully thought out, especially in light of how the Pope is not given to overstatement in this document. This focus on a philosophy of being finds confirmation in the “intimate relationship which exists between faith and metaphysical reasoning.” Knasas draws attention to the footnote found within §97 which includes portions of an address given by John Paul at the Angelicum in 1979. This address is one of his strongest statements in praise of Thomas. Reading the address as it stands in the background of the Pope’s teaching in §97

⁷³ Thomas Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005) 142-143.

makes a stronger case for a continued Thomistic approach being advocated. A portion of the address states the following:

The basis and source of this openness lie in the fact that the philosophy of St. Thomas is a philosophy of being, that is, of the “act of existing” (*actus essendi*) whose transcendental value paves the most direct way to rise to the knowledge of subsisting Being and pure Act, namely to God. On account of this we can even call this philosophy: the philosophy of the proclamation of being, a chant in praise of what exists. ...it is by reason of this affirmation of being that the philosophy of St. Thomas is able to, and indeed must, go beyond all that presents itself directly in knowledge as an existing thing (given to experience) in order to reach "that which subsists as sheer Existing" (*ipsum Esse subsistens*) and also creative Love; for it is this which provides the ultimate(and therefore necessary) explanation of the fact that "it is preferable to be than not to be" (*Potius est ess quam non esse*) and, in particular, of the fact that we exist.⁷⁴

In §105-§106 we find John Paul's final appeal to "recover and express to the full the metaphysical dimension of truth" (§105) and to "have the courage to recover, in the flow of an enduringly valid philosophical tradition, the range of authentic wisdom and truth-metaphysical truth included-which is proper to philosophical enquiry." (§106) The call for recovery carries with it the implications mentioned in Chapter One, namely, that what was once present has now been lost (at least in part, or by some). Secondly, that what was lost is in fact valuable and worthy of recovery. The Pope has insisted that modern trends in philosophy, most especially those which have been influenced by the “isms” criticized by the Pontiff, have lost that sapiential dimension which a philosophy with a proper metaphysics provides.

In concluding, an investigation of *Fides et Ratio* reveals many notable statements made by the Holy Father that directly relate to the recovery and restoration of the place of metaphysics within Christian Philosophy. By asking the most substantial questions, as are

⁷⁴ Knasas, "Fides et Ratio and the Twentieth Century Thomistic Revival," 405. John Paul II, "Perennial Philosophy of St. Thomas for the Youth of Our Times," *Angelicum*, 57 (1980), 140-141.

found in the realm of metaphysics, and proceeding by way of reason, John Paul is optimistic about our ability to achieve truth. As our current Pontiff Benedict XVI has said, “a philosophy that no longer asks who we are, what we are here for, whether there is a God and eternal life, has abdicated its role as a philosophy.”⁷⁵ The subsequent sections will concentrate on particular aspects of John Paul’s thought in order to flesh out more fully the points of discussion presented in *Fides et Ratio*.

Section 4: The Influence of Kant

By way of an historical overview of the status of modern philosophy, John Paul notes how Continental Philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is rooted in Cartesian thought. From Kant and Hegel to Husserl and Heidegger, we find he argues against a Cartesian starting point. The Pope writes that the “author of the *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* with his ontological proofs, *distanced us from the philosophy of existence*, and also from the traditional approaches of St. Thomas which led to God who is ‘autonomous existence,’ *Ipsum esse subsistens*. By making subjective consciousness absolute, Descartes moves instead toward *pure consciousness of the Absolute*, which is *pure thought*.”⁷⁶ He then goes on to identify the problem incurred by this shift. It takes our focus off of the objective truth and instead places it on the subjective awareness, or the individual consciousness of the thinker. The fallout from this Cartesian shift is tremendous in relation to a Catholic pursuit of philosophy. Descartes, writes the Pope, “turns his back on metaphysics and concentrates on the philosophy of knowledge. Kant is his most nota-

⁷⁵ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 209.

⁷⁶ His Holiness John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee, ed. Vittorio Messori (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994) 51.

ble representative.”⁷⁷ Quinn concurs with the Pope as he points out the underlying mindset of these and like thinkers. He mentions how “the ‘modern’ philosophy understood itself less as a quest for wisdom than as a project of emancipation from any authority, natural or supernatural, to which human reason had allowed itself to become subject.” He goes on to cite Kant who reveals his vision of the enlightenment as being liberated from the constraints of all authority. In Kant’s words, “*Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without guidance of another.*”⁷⁸ This type of thought mirrors that of Descartes, who, Quinn notes, “recommends obedience to a ‘provisional morality,’ that is one that will be replaced once modern science is in full swing.”⁷⁹

The influence that Kant had on the intellectual life of John Paul is undeniable. That Kant in many ways proved a formidable challenge to the Pope and to Catholic thinkers in general is best conveyed in a story conveyed by Weigel. He writes that “the young priest was open to engaging modern philosophy on its own terms, and would recall years later that wrestling with Kant’s second categorical imperative⁸⁰ was ‘particularly important’ for his later thinking. (That it was indeed wrestling was neatly conveyed by John Paul II on one occasion when he remarked to guests, ‘Kant, *Mein Gott!* Kant!’).”⁸¹ Prudence Allen notes interestingly that seminarians at Catholic University during the

⁷⁷ His Holiness John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 52.

⁷⁸ Quinn, “Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical,” 178-179. Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* In *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Konigliche Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900ff.) volume VIII, 35.

⁷⁹ Quinn, “Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical,” 180.

⁸⁰ The second categorical imperative concerns always treating a human being, including oneself, as an end and never a means.

⁸¹ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 128.

mid-forties had as a text a popular work by Farges and Barbedette subtitled *Ad mentem S. Thomae Aquinatis esposita et regentioribus scientiarum inventis aptata necnon instructa contra Kantismum*.⁸² The refutation of Kant was seemingly considered one of the many maneuvers to master on the way to orders.

Kant's profound effect on modern philosophy was such that it caused some to accuse phenomenologists and personalists of being "Kantian." Robert Kraynak is one of those who make this charge against John Paul and other Catholics who have bought into Personalism. He maintains that when these Personalists concede to Kantian insight in the area of ethics they buy into Kant's system in a way which affects the rest of their writings. Derek Jeffreys, on the other hand, takes issue with this accusation. He writes that "John Paul II uses Kant's ethics without generating into a Kantian...Christian intellectuals are perfectly capable of retrieving aspects of modern thought while securing them in a sound metaphysic."⁸³ And this, according to Dulles is the path taken by John Paul. Dulles writes, "Giving some credit to Kant for his analysis of moral experience, Wojtyla agrees that the experience of conscience and obligation leads to God as the personal source of moral necessity. He accepts Kant's principle that we may never treat other persons as mere means to an end. But whereas Kant argued formalistically from a postulate of practical reason, Wojtyla grounds the transcendental precept in a metaphysical insight into the intrinsic and inviolable dignity of the person as such."⁸⁴

⁸² Prudence Allen, "Person and Complementarity," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, 53.

⁸³ Derek S. Jeffreys, "The Influence of Kant on Christian Theology: A Debate About Human Dignity and Christian Personalism," Fall 2004, 20 February 2007
<http://www.acton.org/publicat/m_and_m/new/index.php?mm_id=2>.

⁸⁴ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 6-7.

The influence of Kant on modern thought is indisputable among all philosophers. To ignore the power and appeal he has in the thought of many philosophers would do a disservice to an authentic philosophical assessment of modernity. Certainly the Thomistic approach to inquiry would seek to give full range to his voice where correct, and to counter him where mistaken. John Paul's willingness to engage modern philosophers speaks well of a "Church in the Modern World" and of one who calls on this Church to be engaged with the contemporary culture.

Section 5: Phenomenology and Personalism

John Paul was part of a philosophy faculty that agreed that its first principle of investigation would make use of the phenomenological approach. This method sought to discover the treasures of human experience before entertaining cosmological questions. If it proved fruitful, it could help to reconcile the thought of the Church with modernity on a number of fronts.⁸⁵ This more personal technique may have led the university professor to be a bit more adventurous and liberated than if he were part of a more traditionally minded faculty. This, coupled with his natural propensity to pursue scholarship in a minimally footnoted manner, allowed the Pope to take human experience, perhaps especially his personal experience, seriously. The Pope's subjective approach is substantiated in *Fides et Ratio* in his choice to employ two proofs (§14, §15) for the existence of God from Augustine and Anselm rather than from Thomas. Sweeney thinks this choice demonstrates a fundamental disposition on the part of the Pope concerning *his preference of a philosophical starting point*. In his footnote he writes that "given the later emphasis on metaphysics and an account of nature within Christian philosophy, this focus on

⁸⁵ Weigel, "Wojtyla's Walk Among the Philosophers," 12.

Augustine's and Anselm's proofs is striking, and it supports the contention that 'nature' and 'metaphysics' in *Fides et ratio* are not necessarily tied to a philosophical starting point in the material world."⁸⁶ Certainly some of this personal emphasis can be attributed to the influence of Max Scheler. However, as was earlier noted, despite his appreciation of some of his personalist insights, John Paul thought that Scheler fell short.⁸⁷

The *personal dimension* is also elaborated upon by Hemming when he mentions that the first lines of the encyclical indicate how both faith and reason (the two wings) are to aid the person to rise to the contemplation of truth. His point is that the document properly relates the *animus* and contemplation. It asserts that the "human being is the place of unfolding of faith and reason. The proper *hypostasis* or *locus* of faith and reason is the human intellectual being, me and you. Faith and reason are not things in their own right, they are ways of bringing the thing that is my being into the province of God."⁸⁸ This concentration on the person reflects the modern atmosphere following the "turn to the subject," and yet points to the subject concentrating on the objective Reality, which is God.

As the human person is the locus of both the act of faith and the ability to reason, there should therefore be no necessary conflict between the two, at least in principle. Faith and reason are subsequent to the human person. Both of these activities begin with the person who precedes them. In other words, they exist in virtue of the being of the person.⁸⁹ In this context faith and reason appear as instrumental goods. They serve to draw the person into a relationship with truth, both finite and infinite.

⁸⁶ Sweeney, "The Medievalism of *Fides et Ratio*," 165.

⁸⁷ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 4.

⁸⁸ Hemming, "Unreasonable Faith," 395.

⁸⁹ Allen, "Person and Complementarity," 39.

Beginning with the person opens up the discovery of the undeniable ethical dimension. It was within this sphere of ethics that the Lublin school hoped that metaphysics and anthropology could meet.⁹⁰ In the thought of John Paul, a proper investigation of the person, a true anthropology, will inevitably lead to metaphysics. In fact he wrote that “we are witnessing a symptomatic return to metaphysics through anthropology.”⁹¹ What is exposed here is the necessary interplay of truth as approached from every angle. Whether one begins with the objective or subjective point of view, a realist system is what binds them together and allows all investigations to bear fruit. An objective truth does not necessarily cancel out subjective perspectives concerning that truth. Ethics, anthropology and metaphysics appear in the writings of the Pope as intimately intertwined. However, even though we find in his writings an insistence on the objectively real, Barrett notes that *The Acting Person* is “designed to put anthropology as the centre-stage of philosophy for the twenty-first century.”⁹² Barrett is convinced that the substantiation for this claim of anthropological superiority is found in John Paul’s choice of a first encyclical, *Redemptoris Hominis*. It is believed by some that the initial encyclical offered by a Pontiff indicates the direction and emphasis of his pontificate. While John Paul’s initial encyclical letter focused on the person, its content was certainly laden with metaphysics.

For all of the positive acclaim, not all thinkers are pleased with Christian Personalism. Robert Kraynak, as previously mentioned, thinks that Christian Personalism has done more harm to the Church than good. His argument is briefly as follows: Christian believers have been confused by Personalism inasmuch as it has been tied to the language of modern liberal democracy. The language (personhood, human rights, subjective con-

⁹⁰ Weigel, "Wojtyla's Walk Among the Philosophers," 10.

⁹¹ His Holiness John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 35.

⁹² Barrett, "The Survival of Reason: Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*," 366.

sciousness, etc.) has brought about a confusion which places religion into the sphere of the personal, private and subjective. Religion has become a private affair, more concerned with subjective religious convictions rather than an adherence to objective truth. As we live in a culture where many believe that one should avoid discussing religion and politics in polite company, it then follows that one's personal views are best kept to oneself. As a consequence, a misunderstood Personalism has not influenced and transformed the world, but the world has instead exerted a greater influence on the Church.⁹³

Although this may adequately reflect the current climate, it says nothing about the merits or failings of Personalism itself. Rather, it focuses on how Personalism has been misconstrued and has failed to bring to bear its message. The Christian system of beliefs if held to the same standard of how it has been perceived could be accused of the same charge. Historically, Christianity has largely been misunderstood and its terms have often been co-opted and used against it. This line of attack (that it is often misunderstood) has as much to say about the tenets and approach of Personalism as it would for Christianity as a whole. If Personalism has been misrepresented it may stand to exhort its proponents to clarify their position so that its merits may be properly evaluated. A wholesale dismissal in light of perceived shortcomings seems rash.

Another facet to consider, and also tied to metaphysical thinking, is the *communal aspect* found within the thought of John Paul. Both reason and faith are communal in nature. Both are received and are subsequently meant to be passed on. As concerns intellectual inquiry, Freddoso considers the communal setting "absolutely crucial to the Pope's account." He finds that §70-§73 speak clearly to this end, and continues "For even though

⁹³ Robert P. Kraynak, "A Response to Derek S. Jeffreys," Fall 2004, 20 February 2007 <http://www.acton.org/publicat/m_and_m/new/index.php?mm_id=2>.

inquiry is seen as perfecting the individual inquirers themselves, its most important function is to serve the broader community that gives rise to and sustains it. ... So the ideal life of inquiry is essentially social in both its origins and its aims.”⁹⁴ He goes on to quote a germane passage from St. Thomas who writes, “just as it is greater to illuminate than merely to shine, so too is it greater to give to others what one has contemplated than merely to contemplate.”⁹⁵ And yet, this communal focus is never to overshadow the primary importance of the individual. Thomistic Personalism “is based on the view that the individual good of a person must, as a matter of principle, be subordinated to the common good, but... such subordination can not in any event erase and devalue the person.”⁹⁶

Following this line of thought there are some who believe that the communal emphasis is the future direction and the necessary path for the Church as it continues to confront modernity. Some have even proposed it as the direction of metaphysics for the third millennium. Bishop Vigneron writes:

As the inculturation of the Gospel in the first two millennia required the reshaping of all convictions and values in the light of the first principles that eventually emerged in creation metaphysics, the convictions and values of the culture needed for the next Christian millennium will rest upon the metaphysics of communion. Thomas taught us that *ens commune* exists as a participation in *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, *ens commune* has *esse*, but is not *esse*. Could we not look for the day when we will see that “to be,” whether subsistent or by participation, cannot not be “to be with”? That sort of metaphysics would be the highest achievement of a culture of communion, the *episteme* for all the many elements that would constitute its *doxa*.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Freddoso, "Fides et Ratio: A "Radical" Vision of Intellectual Inquiry," 18.

⁹⁵ *Summa Theologiae* II-II. Q. 188.a.6.

⁹⁶ Szulc, *Pope John Paul II*, 151.

⁹⁷ Vigneron, "The New Evangelization and the Teaching of Philosophy," 105.

Interestingly enough, the appeal of this metaphysical approach should not be underestimated. The cases made against metaphysics are often waged with a mind towards emphasizing interpersonal relations which at times has been pivoted against a cold objectivist approach.

Upon pondering metaphysics on the whole, what is being called into consideration is a change in emphasis. Whether we start from the observation of creation, the experience of the person, or our communal existence, often stress is placed on the point of departure. However, the point of departure one chooses does not necessarily cancel out or invalidate other points of departure. If it is well received it may indicate a starting place amenable to the current climate of scholarship. Since the current climate is influenced by post-modern thinkers, the next chapter will examine some of their thoughts and will seek to ascertain possible ways to proceed in light of their findings.

In support of the promising place that John Paul's approach may provide, Dulles believes that "Personalist phenomenology, practiced according to the Lublin school of Thomism, can contribute to a much-needed renewal of metaphysics."⁹⁸ He also perceived that the phenomenological approach might be more able to produce desirable results in light of John Paul's stance concerning the objective status of the world and the objective ethical requirements made of the person in response to it. The insistence on objective reality in the thought of John Paul does not diminish the "phenomenological analysis but rather enriches it by placing human experience within the framework of a metaphysics of being."⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Dulles, "Can Philosophy Be Christian? The New State of the Question," 19.

⁹⁹ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 6.

There is an undeniable reciprocity between person and metaphysics. Metaphysics aids the person seeking truth. It is a tool which is meant to assist the human person in grasping what is real. Since the truth is related to God, as ultimate Truth, all discovery of reality aids in our ascent to God.¹⁰⁰ However much metaphysics may aid in this task it is also necessary to keep in mind the conviction of John Paul, that metaphysics is at the service of the person, and not vice versa.

The phenomenological method of John Paul couples experience and metaphysics in a manner which brings about a valuable contribution. His metaphysics “enables him to penetrate beyond the phenomena to their ontological ground, thus moving from raw experience to understanding. He makes use of metaphysical principles for purposes of reasoning from phenomena as data to the principles and causes that explain them.”¹⁰¹

In addition to the influence that Thomas had on him, the added impact of existentialism and phenomenology upon John Paul was considerable.¹⁰² One could argue that it was so considerable that he continued to remain one of its proponents even in light of the difficulties faced when trying to reconcile the two. What has become known as Phenomenological Realism works to affirm the truth grasped in and through both pursuits. Starting with the person we are able to grasp things as they are in themselves. A grasping, as previously noted, that John Paul thinks best described as an *adaequatio*. In any case, according to John Paul, what is being asserted is that a synthesis is possible.¹⁰³ This methodology was adopted by a number of philosophers and even inspired the work of the International Academy of Philosophy in Liechtenstein. One of the most prolific of the

¹⁰⁰ Selman, "The Recovery of Metaphysics," 399.

¹⁰¹ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 2.

¹⁰² Paul Johnson, *Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Restoration* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) 12-13.

¹⁰³ Weigel, "Wojtyla's Walk Among the Philosophers," 7.

group, Josef Seifert, has persisted in directing this effort and continues to maintain a following.¹⁰⁴

In the mind of John Paul, the person is the focal point and center of all philosophical pursuits, and he holds this as biblically grounded. This status is due to the person's being created as in the *imago Dei*. The anthropological focus is employed by John Paul in light of a number of modern problems facing society. In response to the many contemporary problems mentioned in *Fides et Ratio*, Koterski says John Paul draws our attention to the solution. This solution, he believes, is to be found in using the best traditions of anthropology and metaphysics.¹⁰⁵ This approach is echoed in §83 where the Pope articulates his marriage of metaphysics and anthropology.

The *focus upon the person* can be found in all the writings of John Paul's lengthy pontificate. This personal focus is in no way a narrowing of the Catholic perspective, but broadens the possible horizon of scholarship. Unlike many of the challenges posed by post-modern thinkers who opt to dismiss past systems and replace them with new ones of their own making, John Paul seeks to synthesize the heritage of the past and add a new dimension. A "turn to the subject" does not have to result in an endless drift. The person viewed as a ship in the sea may legitimately constitute a valid starting point for the commencement of an adventure while still acknowledging an objective world in which to travel. While taking a voyage an objective focus helps one to stay clear of danger and to reach one's destination. As noted by Admiral Nimitz, "you should chart your course by the fixed stars rather than by the lights of every passing ship." The objectively fixed stars in no way invalidate the viewpoint of the subjective voyaging ship. The person is in fact

¹⁰⁴ Josef Seifert, *Back to Things in Themselves* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).

¹⁰⁵ Joseph W. Koterski, "The Challenge to Metaphysics in *Fides et Ratio*," *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio*, 27.

the center of all encounters, of all adventures, of all that is objectively perceived. To take it a step further, it is the person (the whole person) who thinks, believes and acts in the Act of Faith which is central to the Christian life.¹⁰⁶

Lest the personal concentration seem to focus too much on an isolated individual, the Pope always seeks to place the person in the context of the community. As Koterski notes, the Pope has spent a lifetime arguing for dignity that essentially emanates from the human person, but he does so within the context of community.¹⁰⁷ Prudence Allen concurs when she notes that John Paul teaches that it is necessary for a person to be in relationship with God and with others for the fulfillment of one's own essence.¹⁰⁸

One illustration of how the extension of traditional metaphysics takes on new life with the personal focus can be found by examining a passage taken from *The Acting Person*. In this passage we see John Paul using the theory of potency-act to elaborate upon his anthropology of change.

It is these transitions that objectivize the structure of all dynamism inherent in being, in being as such, which constitutes the proper object of metaphysics, and at the same time in every and any being, regardless of the branch of human knowledge whose specific concern it constitutes. We may with justice say that at this point metaphysics appears as the intellectual soil wherein all the domains of knowledge have their roots. Indeed, we do not seem to have as yet any other conceptions and any other language which would adequately render the dynamic essence of change – of all change wherever occurring in any being – apart from those that we have been endowed with by the philosophy of potency and act.¹⁰⁹

Dulles refers to this passage when he asserts that John Paul acknowledges that both the objective and subjective dimensions of truth are necessary for a satisfactory philosophy

¹⁰⁶ Allen, "Person and Complementarity," 45.

¹⁰⁷ Koterski, "The Challenge to Metaphysics in *Fides et Ratio*," 25.

¹⁰⁸ Allen, "Person and Complementarity," 41.

¹⁰⁹ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1979) 63-64.

of being.¹¹⁰ John Paul also reveals his conviction that to date there are no other concepts or an alternative language that better explains change. This statement implies two things. The first is that the Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics has not been surpassed, according to the Pope, by any other competitor.¹¹¹ The second implication is that he admits of the *possibility* of another system which in theory could in fact supersede, or at least be equivalent to, the Aristotelian-Thomist conception of change.

Section 6: Metaphysical Statements from Other Writings

The study of the thought progression of John Paul offers us some further insight. He declares that "there were two stages to my intellectual journey: in the first I moved from literature to metaphysics, while the second led me from metaphysics to phenomenology. This was the grounding for my own scholarly work."¹¹²

The first intellectual movement was one of imagination. The free range of play that is present in literature may have set in place a broad love for beauty which is difficult to confine to systematic treatments of reality. And yet, the imagination and the experience of beauty call for systematic explanation. Within this context, John Paul is poised to ask penetrating questions of reality. This first movement from literature to metaphysics allows for the development of the beautiful and the imaginative while grounding it in realism. It is realism which allows for the communication of beauty in a way which marks its objective as well as its subjective reality. And the final move to phenomenology may

¹¹⁰ Dulles, "The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II," 8.

¹¹¹ In order to explore this claim to the full, one would have to know which systems he has ascertained in order to make such an assessment, since none are specifically listed, but he nonetheless affirms the Thomistic conception.

¹¹² John Paul II, *Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way*, trans. Walter Ziemba (New York: Warner Book Group, 2004) 95.

have provided the means by which the subjective, experiential apprehension of reality might find its home in an objective universe.

An example that draws together all three dimensions, literature, metaphysics and phenomenology, can be found in the dramatic work of then Cardinal Wojtyla, *The Jeweler's Shop*. In that work Andrew, a young man who is beginning to fall in love, contemplates the nature of love and the choices it involves. The interplay between the subjective and objective is important to note. Andrew reflects, "For my senses fed at every step on the charms of the women I met. When once or twice I tried following them, I met solitary islands. This made me think that beauty accessible to the senses can be a difficult gift or a dangerous one; I met people led by it to hurt others-and so, gradually, I learned to value beauty accessible to the mind, that is to say, truth."¹¹³

In *Love and Responsibility* John Paul includes two sections dealing with metaphysics. The first is a *metaphysical analysis of love*. He considers this a metaphysical analysis due to the universal nature of love. His point of departure on this universal level states that:

...love is always a mutual relationship between persons. This relationship in turn is based on particular attitudes towards the good, adapted by each of them individually and by both jointly. This is the point of departure for the first part of our analysis of love, the general analysis....These elements are found in any love. There is, for instance, in every love attraction and goodwill. Love between man and woman is one particular form of love, in which elements common to all of its forms are embodied in a specific way. That is why we have called our general analysis metaphysical. Metaphysical analysis will clear the way for psychological analysis.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Karol Wojtyla, *The Jeweler's Shop*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) 25.

¹¹⁴ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (New York: Farrar - Straus - Giroux, 1981) 73.

John Paul is expanding the traditional subject matter of metaphysics to include those dimensions of anthropology that have universal bearing. In this case he is expanding the treatment of the pursuit of the good within the context of love experienced by couples in pursuit of the good. This exploration of relation has been the focus of more recent works as, for example, previously noted in Clarke's "The 'We Are' of Interpersonal Dialogue As the Starting Point of Metaphysics."¹¹⁵

The second section of this work also includes a metaphysical analysis in an *exposé upon shame*. As in the previous section, the writing is meant to draw attention to universal elements found in human nature. Shame, being a universal experience, is explored and related to love and human sexuality. This phenomenological approach to shame has been taken up before, he notes, in the works of Scheler and Sawicki. A later treatment which bears some resemblance to the Pope's is to be found in the writings of Dietrich von Hildebrand in his work *In Defense of Purity*.¹¹⁶ In both works the premise regarding shame is that " *the phenomenon of shame arises when something which of its very nature or in view of its purpose ought to be private passes the bounds of a person's privacy and somehow becomes public.*" The second movement is that of love. In this movement shame is absorbed by love. Within the context of love the person is valued and is not subjected to being used by another. Here we find the phenomenological experience of shame properly directed and rooted in love. In other words we find metaphysics as able to ground ethics which is the concern of John Paul. Once again, this topic was not

¹¹⁵ Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being- God – Person*, 42.

¹¹⁶ Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *In Defense of Purity* (Chicago: Franciscan Herold Press, 1970).

treated by Aristotle in his classical *Metaphysics*, but is considered by John Paul to fall within the realm of the “new metaphysics.”¹¹⁷

Continuing with the above, the Pope’s metaphysical anthropology is further developed in his *Theology of the Body*. In his *General Audience of December 2, 1981*, he takes up what did in fact fall under the sphere of metaphysics proper: the relationship between the body and the soul. It is John Paul’s contention that theological anthropology for the Christian must place its concentration upon the resurrection. This anthropology of resurrection so influenced the thought of Thomas, according to the Pope, that he was drawn away from Plato and towards Aristotle concerning an understanding of bodily existence. He notes how the “body as prison” imagery used by Plato is wholly insufficient for genuinely Christian Anthropology.¹¹⁸ Following the thought of Tresmontant, the Christian understanding of the person as a body/soul composite is a necessity. This more Aristotelian approach understood that the human person was lacking when the soul was separated from the body. The whole of this treatment serves to clarify the eschatological character of the body and emphasizes the body’s importance in the present.¹¹⁹

Section 7: Evaluation

The following section draws upon a good number of those who have contributed thus far in our understanding of John Paul as well as some new contributors. Particular focus is placed upon two works by Thomas Guarino as he nicely lays out many points both pro and con that bear upon foundational Christian thought, and metaphysics in par-

¹¹⁷ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 174.

¹¹⁸ One must note that this may not be Plato’s own position, but that of characters in his dialogues. Plato at times can be unnecessarily criticized due to the expertise required to grasp the complexity of his works.

¹¹⁹ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997) 240.

ticular. In addressing many modern attempts at formulating a systematic theology, Guarino quotes Walter Kasper who acutely felt the need for metaphysics as a means to establish a timeless, consistent message that is faithful and trustworthy through the ages. Kasper states that “the true and deepest crisis of present theology is that there is now no metaphysics.” He attributes this crisis to anti-metaphysical philosophies and an over zealous effort to overcome narrow thinking, thereby dismissing metaphysics altogether.¹²⁰ Further framing up the problem, Quinn succinctly surveys the contemporary philosophical climate and says “no faith, in short, no metaphysics; and with no metaphysics, faith comes to seek refuge in private experience.”¹²¹ Selman quotes Clifford Longley who says much the same thing when he asserts:

Unless it is grounded in reality, one must doubt whether a sense of the sacred can be much more than a kind of aesthetic sensitivity, an accoutrement of a man or a woman of exemplary taste. And one must doubt whether it can be grounded in reality without something like metaphysics to give it a firm anchor.¹²²

Perhaps worse than being relegated to the realm of aesthetics, the demise of metaphysics may result in agnosticism. Through a denial of the knowledge of God that is ascertainable through reason one is left with few options to explain faith. On the rational level agnosticism ensues. This movement towards agnosticism was laid out by the Pope as he presented the dangerous philosophies of our day. These precarious paths devoid of metaphysics lead inevitably towards agnosticism. Mario Enrique Sacchi writes that “the plain truth is that metaphysics and agnosticism are irreconcilable enemies. ...agnosticism

¹²⁰ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 47. Kasper, *theology and Church*, 3. see also Kasper, “Postmodern Dogmatics,” *Communio* 17 (1990): 181-191.

¹²¹ Quinn, “Infides et Unratio: Modern Philosophy and the Papal Encyclical,” 188.

¹²² Selman, “The Recovery of Metaphysics,” 376.

is a denial of first philosophy because this science would have no *raison d'être* if the human intellect cannot get a certain knowledge of the divine being.”¹²³

How do the critics respond to John Paul and his call for a metaphysical retrieval? Guarino begins to present contrary voices by opining that *Fides et Ratio* does not particularly call for metaphysics as much as “philosophies with a genuinely metaphysical range.” Allowing for those who are dissatisfied with the metaphysical attempts to date, Guarino, however, does see the need for *some foundation*. He writes that “without a ‘foundationalist’ ontology of some sort, there is no possibility for logically sustaining the universality and continuity of doctrine.”¹²⁴ He adds that substantial thinkers have weighed in on this topic. Among them he mentions Rahner, Lonergan and Sokolowski, who all think that “some kind of broadly metaphysical approach is necessary if one is to defend adequately fundamental positions regarding Christian teaching.”¹²⁵ Yet, some foundation is not of necessity metaphysics.

Guarino offers four arguments posited against *Fides et Ratio*, one from his book and three from an article he authored in *Theological Studies*. For the first, he presents the criticisms of Richard Bernstein. Bernstein expresses some frustration over the lack of freedom he feels the Pope offers to those he invites on the philosophical search or journey. Bernstein is convinced that John Paul has already exerted a nonnegotiable foundationalist approach while feigning an openness. He also calls into question whether all people universally seek ultimate or final truth as the Pope asserts. Bernstein, a non-foundationalist, believes that John Paul has built into his premises his conclusions. In

¹²³ Mario Enrique Sacchi, *The Exaltation of Metaphysics in John Paul II's Fides et Ratio*. 10-8-2007 <<http://www.2.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/ti99/sacchi.htm>>.

¹²⁴ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 42.

¹²⁵ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 46.

effect, he is begging the question. Bernstein is convinced that the very best philosophy of the moderns has thrown into question the idea of absolute truth. Although Guarino thinks that Bernstein does not understand what is called for in the *fides quaerens intellectum*, he does agree that the document tends to misrepresent postmodern and pragmatic thought.¹²⁶

The second criticism calls into question the way that John Paul has insisted upon our ability to know the truth. In §82, as noted earlier, John Paul chose to use the Thomistic correspondence theory of understanding to indicate the appropriate type of realism that the encyclical was espousing. Guarino himself questions the prudence of such a siding with Thomas. Guarino does admit that the Pontiff must defend realism, and states that “realism alone allows the Church to defend Christian doctrine as not only symbolic and disclosive but also as ontologically true.” He likewise notes that “theological language and interpretation cannot simply ‘defer’ in the Derridean sense but must ultimately offer us ‘a statement which is simply true; otherwise there would be no Revelation of God, but only the expression of human notions about God.’”¹²⁷ Yet, he asks if this realism must necessarily be tied to *adaequatio* as is called for by John Paul. He wonders whether this undermines the portion of the document that allows for, and may in effect promote a pluralism of theological approaches. Does the Pope bind us to an Aristotelian-Thomistic means for understanding? Guarino offers Sokolowski as an example of a thinker bearing a realist epistemology who does not fall under the *adaequatio* conception of understanding. In his footnote he asks “whether the encyclical would not have been further strengthened, had it noted, as [Louis] Dupré does, that while correspondence should not be rejected, speaking about truth as ‘disclosure’ serves to protect the truly religious nature of

¹²⁶ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 13-14.

¹²⁷ Guarino, "Fides et Ratio: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism," 691.

truth while standing at some distance from the subjectivism of modernity.” Guarino is of the mind that this move towards *adaequatio* has failed to pay proper respect to the subjective dimension of knowing which is indicative of this age. He is concerned that this concept of understanding distances itself from modernity. In summary he asserts that “the inability of the encyclical to come to grips with serious philosophical issues raised by modernity, such as the role of subjectivity and historicity in knowing, represents an unnecessary hesitation in the Church’s attempt to enrich its intellectual and spiritual heritage with all that is true and human.” He seeks to strengthen his argument by noting that when the document fails to mention either Blondel or Maréchal, it is an indication of John Paul’s disinterest in the subjective dimensions of knowing. He counters the previously mentioned argument by Henrici (that Blondel was not mentioned by John Paul in order not to canonize his thought) as “entirely too benign an interpretation.” Guarino is instead of the mind that this move was purposive, and indicates a preference for objective knowing.¹²⁸

His third criticism is the most pertinent to this dissertation. John Paul pitted nihilism, which he saw as the culmination of faulty philosophies, against metaphysics. Guarino asks whether there might be another alternative to these two options. He notes that “many contemporary philosophers and theologians are seeking to overcome both relativism and anarchic irrationalism. But they wish to do so without metaphysics, without even a renewed metaphysics, which they deem philosophically untenable.” These thinkers seek to place more emphasis upon historicity and linguistics which typifies the work being done in modern circles of scholarship. Guarino cautions that he and others are not calling for a system of relativism, but for an exploration of the possibility of a non-

¹²⁸ Guarino, "*Fides et Ratio*: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism," 692-693.

metaphysical means of expression. He thinks that despite its favorable aspects, the encyclical does not adequately deal with postmodern concerns that are tied to considerations of culture and history. He thinks that *Fides et Ratio*, on this point, diminishes the philosophical progress by unnecessarily calling for a return to metaphysics rather than calling for a means of thought that would not be relativistic, and yet would answer the questions and concerns posed by modernity.

Guarino's final criticism concerns the promulgation of the Church's form/content or context/content distinction in light of the sustained role it has played since Vatican II. He writes "the intention of this distinction is to allow a fundamental content, the *depositum fidei*, to be expressed through a variety of perspectives and terminologies. This is the distinction invoked by John XXIII in his opening address, *Gaudet mater ecclesia*, and, in different places and in various ways, by the conciliar documents themselves (*Gaudium et spes* no. 62, *Unitatis redintegratio* nos. 6, 17)." In essence, Guarino is concerned that the document focuses too much on the content and not enough on the form and context. He continues that "this expected emphasis on the identity and perpetuity of the doctrine's truth is not balanced with earlier ecclesial accents on the possible variety of conceptual formulation."

He concludes with a few possible reasons for the above omission. He wonders whether since a significant portion of the document focuses upon allowing a plurality of philosophies that perhaps John Paul thought there needed to be a counterbalance focused upon the preservation of the traditional terminology. In addition he wonders whether the Church was lending a note of caution by reminding readers that a philosophical system

must be “tried” and found able to stand the test of time. In any case, Guarino thinks this a missed opportunity.¹²⁹

Section 8: Conclusion

In presenting concluding remarks on the works of John Paul in general and *Fides et Ratio* in particular it is helpful to keep a few things in mind. First, the context in which he writes and the forms in which he expresses himself are both thoroughly Christian. This important distinction aids in the evaluation of the legacy of John Paul. Did the Pope accomplish the goals that he set out to achieve as a bearer of the faith? Did his work help to illuminate the mystery of existence from a philosophical perspective? Was he able to give voice to the insights discovered from a phenomenological perspective, and how did his faith influence his approach? All of these questions are rightly addressed in light of the Pope’s faith perspective.

The substantial contribution to the Christian community is helpful to both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul is clear that the Word of God is supremely authoritative, and that all subsequent elaborations upon truth, whether philosophical or theological are thus bound to it. “It is not the wisdom of words, but the Word of Wisdom which Saint Paul offers as the criterion of both truth and salvation.” (§ 23) And likewise he writes that:

Underlying all the Church's thinking is the awareness that she is the bearer of a message which has its origin in God himself (cf. *2 Cor* 4:1-2). The knowledge which the Church offers to man has its origin not in any speculation of her own, however sublime, but in the word of God which she has received in faith (cf. *1 Th* 2:13). (§ 7)

¹²⁹ Guarino, "*Fides et Ratio*: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism," 693-695.

With the word of God at its center the Church is then bound, as the document has noted many times, to employ a philosophy which is congruent with this revelation. Selman put it thus: "Theology cannot render intelligible to us the mystery revealed in the Bible unless it employs philosophy suited and open to certain features of Scripture."¹³⁰ Freddoso further notes that "what it implies for philosophy is that the mysteries of the Christian Faith must appear as first principles in any successful attempt to articulate the full truth about God, the world, and ourselves."¹³¹ Tresmontant has said as much and more about the need for our first principles (metaphysics) to be biblically founded, or at least biblically congruent.

The next point builds upon the first. In the process of receiving and then passing down the content of revelation a type of consistency is required. Guarino addresses this need in discussing what Catholic theology refers to as continuity in the development of dogma. He later draws from Lonergan and Rahner, both of whom admit of a core content that is able to be expressed in different forms.¹³² In being faithful to this core content one need ask if metaphysics necessarily must be present. If so, in what way and to what extent is it needed? If not, what foundational system must be in place?

Wolfgang Pannenberg considered this question and answered thus: "in theology... the rejection of metaphysics cannot be successful over the long haul."¹³³ Selman echoes his thought and considers the consequences of the loss of metaphysics. His conclusion is that we have witnessed the following in the elimination of metaphysics:

¹³⁰ Selman, "The Recovery of Metaphysics," 379.

¹³¹ Freddoso, "Fides et Ratio: A "Radical" Vision of Intellectual Inquiry," 16.

¹³² Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 44-45.

¹³³ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 48. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 5, 6.

1. To confine the mind to the imagination (all our ideas are derived from impressions, there is nothing real of which we do not have an image or picture).
2. To cut off the mind from the senses, which is a dualism of mind and body, if we can bypass the senses for our knowledge (Plato, Descartes' 'mental inspection').¹³⁴

Guarino is not as convinced that metaphysics proper is what is required, but is convinced that some form of foundationalism is essential. He concludes in his treatment of foundational thought that theology can not invest itself in any system which is non-foundationalist or anti-metaphysical. To do so would result in an unintelligible faith or a loss of material unity and the continuity of faith.¹³⁵ Whereas thinkers such as Gerard Loughlin want to assert that theological discourse is itself foundational, and that from it all other ideas, concepts and theological conclusions should be derived, Barrett in contrast notes that Loughlin fails to take into account the needed metaphysical foundation, without which religious experience found in theological discourse would be reduced to a form of fideism.¹³⁶

While maintaining the primacy of place afforded to theology, reason must not be dismissed. To insist that theology, if rational, must be grounded in an understandable system is not to do damage to the deposit of faith, but on the contrary, to fortify it. Guarino puts it thus:

One may say, then, that the kind of "foundationalism" defended by *Fides et ratio* is quite specific and always elaborated within the house of faith. Attempts to establish a *prima philosophia* are demanded by revelation, never done apart from it, and are ultimately subject to theological criteria. The type of foundationalism sanctioned by the document, then, should always be understood as the "second moment" within the *auditus fidei, intellectus fidei* synthesis.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Selman, "The Recovery of Metaphysics," 386.

¹³⁵ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 339.

¹³⁶ Barrett, "The Survival of Reason: Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*," 369.

¹³⁷ Guarino, "*Fides et Ratio*: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism," 686.

Once again, Tresmontant would fit in well with the reflection just offered. Revelation requires that reason give solid and consistent expression to the timeless truth offered by God's Word as conveyed in revelation. Metaphysics is postulated by John Paul as the means to meet this task.

On another level, those not of a faith conviction can ask if his work as a philosopher has anything to offer the non-believer in the philosophical quest? Those not of the Christian persuasion have positively commented upon the merits of *Fides et Ratio*. Richard J. Bernstein, who has much criticism to offer, writes that "what is striking about this letter is its ecumenical and cosmopolitan spirit. It clearly recognizes that there are sources of wisdom that go far beyond the Catholic Church. Christians and non-Christians, East and West, pagans and believers have all contributed to the journey for true knowledge." He adds that "the encyclical letter places the greatest emphasis on philosophical *inquiry* rather than on philosophical systems. The very language of the latter stresses the 'search,' 'journey,' 'path,' and 'struggle' to attain the truth."¹³⁸ Non-Christians do have a friendly partner to dialogue with in John Paul. The record of his papacy speaks loudly of a "reaching out." His pontificate was marked by ecumenical and inter-religious efforts to achieve greater understanding and greater respect. *Fides et Ratio* as well as the other works of John Paul have much to offer if one sees him, as Bernstein does, as fellow traveler on the journey to truth.

I would like to include a few remarks concerning the Protestant Christian reception of the encyclical. By and large the forging of "Christian Philosophy" has been a

¹³⁸ Richard J. Bernstein, "Fides et Ratio: Faith and Reason," *Books & Culture* 5.4 (July/August 1999) 30.

Catholic undertaking. Reformation theology tended to find the damaged intellect resulting from the Fall so disabled and wounded as to render reason's achievement suspicious at best. Certainly scholastic theology was mostly viewed as a complex man-made system, and an unnecessary one at that. The Word was and is the definitive statement and our subsequent development is a watering-down. Why add to what has been definitively spoken? The Catholic response has been to show that the reception of the Word involves a process of thought that explicates and draws out the depth, height and breadth of the fullness of faith in a necessary way. For the individual, it is required for a correct personal understanding. For evangelical purposes, philosophy is needed to understand a secular world in order to carry out "The Great Commission". Many Christians in universities see relativism as one of the greatest obstacles to be overcome in order to clear a path for the Gospel.

In more recent times there is much more of a joint effort. Many Protestant theologians are seeing the usefulness of the philosophical approach of Aquinas. Norman Geisler is a prime example. In all things philosophical he sees Thomas as his closest ally, and has called on fellow Evangelicals to look to Thomas in the same way.¹³⁹ Thomas's metaphysics is especially appreciated by Geisler. He notes that he is not alone in his admiration for the Angelic Doctor and mentions other fellow Evangelicals who also find in Thomas a worldview faithful to the Gospel and yet philosophically rigorous enough in purely secular circles. J. Daryl Charles also weighs in on the thought of John Paul in *Fides et Ratio*. He finds that the contemporary climate is predominantly post-modern and suffers from a rupture between thought and being. Although he thinks the Pope overly optimistic given

¹³⁹ Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).

depravity and the ability of the human intellect after the Fall,¹⁴⁰ he praises the Pope for his strong stance on the need for a foundation in the encyclical. He notes that in the midst of this current climate John Paul is “unabashedly anti-anti-foundationalist.” Nicholas Wolterstorff is wholly enthusiastic in his praise of John Paul. He writes that he is of the Reformed tradition, and not withstanding having a few problems with the Pope on some peripheral issues (such as the consensus of philosophers historically considered, the role of tradition and of Mary), he notes with surprise how this document can be a point of unity for Christians. He asks in light of past controversies: “Could it be that those disputes are on the way to disappearing? For I find myself in almost complete agreement with what the pope says about the relation of faith and reason.”¹⁴¹ He does not find that John Paul has overlooked the weakened state of the intellect after the Fall *if* one uses the proper hermeneutical key to reading it. He writes:

I suggest that if one is to understand what the pope is saying, one must constantly keep in mind the distinction between *properly functioning* human reason, and human reason as it *actually functions* in its fallen state. When the pope is speaking of the former, he can sound exceedingly confident and optimistic concerning the powers of reason; when he is speaking of the latter, he can sound eminently realistic and, on occasion, even judgmental.¹⁴²

Wolterstorff finds that the document strikes a fine balance which is amenable to those in the Catholic and Reformed traditions. This balance is crucial to dispel some of the suspicions present since the time of the split. Faith and reason provide the framework needed to continue building alliances. Wolterstorff even goes so far as to praise the Pope for diagnosing the theological illness of our age. He writes: “to my mind there can be no

¹⁴⁰ Daryl J. Charles, "Passionately Seeking the Truth: Unpunctual Protestant Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*," *Pro Ecclesia* XI.2 (Spring 2002) 133-45.

¹⁴¹ Walter Wolterstorff, "*Fides et Ratio*: Faith and Reason," *Books & Culture* 5.4 (July/August 1999): 28.

¹⁴² Wolterstorff, "*Fides et Ratio*: Faith and Reason," 28-29.

doubt whatsoever that the pope has put his finger on the fundamental ill from which theology has been suffering in recent years. All too often in recent years theology has been in headlong flight from metaphysics- that is, from a willingness to speak about God in particular and reality in general.”¹⁴³ That Christian philosophers from a variety of denominations are able to see in the lack of metaphysics a common formidable problem should prove intriguing at the least. Can metaphysics provide a common framework for all Christians? Does an ecumenically pleasing metaphysics require major revision? Does the biblically focused metaphysics of Tresmontant offer any promise towards this end?

¹⁴³ Wolterstorff, "*Fides et Ratio*: Faith and Reason," 30.

For, after Marion, every route to thinking God via Being or Becoming must be thought again – and thought excessively to see if God can be thus understood in terms of Being without being radically misunderstood as somehow constricted by Being, as somehow less than God. Is Platonic “goodness,” or Christian “agape,” or postmodern “excess” appropriately understood through any notion of Being – whether Scholastic “common being,” Thomistic *esse*, or even Heideggerian *Sein*? The disturbing question – disturbing to so many forms of philosophical theology in our period – will come to haunt any serious theological reader of *God without Being*.¹

-David Tracy

CHAPTER FOUR: THE POSTMODERN CHALLENGE TO METAPHYSICS

Section 1: Introduction

This chapter in no way endeavors to provide a comprehensive treatment of postmodern thought and its relation to metaphysics. It is rather intended to focus upon two postmodern thinkers, both of whom are sufficiently representative of postmodern philosophical theology, and how and why they attempt a refutation of metaphysics. The past two chapters have offered a more in-depth look at two individuals who consider metaphysics essential for Christian philosophical thought. The first chapter presented Tresmontant’s assertion that metaphysics is a necessary outgrowth of a thoughtful commitment to a Judeo-Christian biblical perspective. The second chapter explored the thought of John Paul who advocated metaphysics as a way to ground both the contributions of phenomenology and Christian ethics, as well as being a precondition for achieving rationally grounded thought.

¹ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, Religion and Postmodernism, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991) xiv-vv.

This chapter will present the postmodern challenge to a continued metaphysics within Christian philosophical theology. The arguments of both Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo seek to explicate the perspectives of thinkers of the postmodern philosophical tradition. Philosophers such as Kant, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Husserl and others have contributed to forming a new starting point for philosophical theology. This new starting point is one devoid of metaphysics, or so they assert, and seeks to eliminate foundationalism in all its forms. Although both Marion and Vattimo will be considered, the Marion section will be more extensive. The shorter Vattimo section will share much of the postmodern proclivities found in the Marion segment, but with a focus on his unique contribution.

As concerns both of these thinkers, I will concentrate specifically on the bearing their thought has upon metaphysics. As opposed to John Paul, these thinkers do not advocate a metaphysical retrieval. They would agree with the Pontiff that metaphysics has lost ground in recent years, but find this welcome news. They would consequently disagree with John Paul that any sort of metaphysical retrieval is necessary. In fact they would find this project retrogressive. I shall give voice to their reasoning, provide some voices in opposition to their perspective, and then conclude by proposing a direction for future questions. In the following chapter I will consider how one might reconcile these two opposed schools of thought, if indeed that is possible.

Section 2: Jean-Luc Marion

Jean-Luc Marion is a French Philosopher who was born in 1946. His studies leading up to his professorship culminated at the prestigious Sorbonne. He was influenced by a diverse array of philosophers and theologians. Included in this group were the likes of

Gillis Deleuze and Jacques Derrida as well as the theologians Louis Bouyer, Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Presently he teaches at the University of Chicago and is a coveted speaker worldwide.² Marion is primarily concerned with riding philosophy and theology of metaphysical categories, most especially that of “being.” He finds these categories ultimately destructive and believes that they inevitably lead to the Nietzschean death of God. He prefers the *via negativa* approach of Pseudo-Dionysius which avoids positive categorical assertions of God. He favors thematic exposés of topics such as the icon and idol, the gift, the face and love (agape).³

In attempting to clearly describe and contextualize the postmodern worldview, Stanley J. Grenz contrasts the modern perspective born of the Enlightenment with the postmodern outlook. He describes the modern view as optimistic concerning the ability of the human mind to achieve truth on all levels. “The moderns” he writes “believed that they were able to see the world as it really is. Postmodernism says that this was an illusion.” Postmodern thought further asserted that advances in cultural anthropology revealed that many of the deep assumptions found in any society (their myths) were culturally derived and lacked the universal significance that had been traditionally attributed to them. These meta-narratives, as they call them, no longer possess the authority to form foundational principles able to universally govern thought and ethics. “The demise of the grand narrative means that we no longer search for the one system of myths that can unite human beings into one people or the globe into one ‘world.’”⁴

² Marion, *God Without Being*, 3, 8.

³ *Anthology of Catholic Philosophy*, ed. James C. Swindal and Harry J. Gensler (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2005) 532.

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) 44-45.

The Problem of Language

Following upon this line of thought is the postmodern problem with the nature of language. Two notable contributors to the postmodern view of language, worthy of mention as their work bears considerable influence, are Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty. Derrida is opposed to what can be called a realist view of language. Grenz states that “Derrida denies that language has a fixed meaning connected to a fixed reality or that it unveils definitive truth. He wants to divest us of this modern concept and open us up to the ‘hermeneutical’ possibilities of the written word, the possibilities that arise as we engage in an ongoing conversation with the texts.”⁵ Grenz goes on to explain how Derrida then rebukes the tradition of western philosophy when it claims to have the ability to convey a fixed meaning through language. This western disposition to believe in the power of language as able to convey meaning is called “logocentrism” according to Derrida, and is an untenable position. “Logocentrism is connected to what Derrida calls the ‘metaphysics of presence.’ Western philosophers assume that there is at the foundation of our language a ‘presence’ of being or an essence that we can come to know. And they are convinced that language (the system of linguistic ‘signs’) is able to ‘signify’ or represent this given reality in its essential nature. Consequently, they search for some ultimate ‘word,’ presence, essence, truth, or reality to serve as the foundation for our thought, language, and experience (the ‘transcendental signified’). ... But if such a transcendental signifier did exist, Derrida points out, it would have to lie beyond the linguistic system. It could not be tainted by the play of linguistic differences or in any way be entangled in the

⁵ Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism*, 141.

language it is supposed to anchor.”⁶ This is quite an assertion, and will be challenged as we see how this thought is employed in any way by Marion or Vattimo.

Another notable thinker who exerted substantial influence within postmodern thought is Richard Rorty. He shares with Derrida the conviction that a realist view of language is patently false. Rorty’s approach is a bit different in that he comes to this conclusion from the perspective of a pragmatist thinker. In addition to being a non-realist, Rorty is also a nonessentialist as well as a nonrepresentationalist. As a nonessentialist he denies the knowability as well as the reality that a thing would possess in and of itself. Instead the focus is placed upon the meaning or significance a thing has in relation to other things. The nonrepresentational aspect has direct bearing upon a portion of what has been treated thus far as it stands in contradiction to the correspondence theory of knowledge called for by Pope John Paul and traditionally held in Catholic circles. Nonrepresentationalists object to those who believe that language is able to represent the world as it actually is. They prefer to think of language more loosely as *cohering* in some way with the world.⁷ No pretense is made that there is an actual conveyance of reality through language, only to a “working relationship” between language and the world.

What is crucial at this point is to note the impasse that results from the construction of such linguistic systems when put in dialogue with any realist system that asserts a greater optimism in regard to the ability of language. The conversation seems ended before it can begin, and perhaps we will have to settle for something less at this point, namely, a comparison and perhaps more optimistically a mutual exchange on related points. This in some ways is the case as we look to bring Marion and Vattimo to the table

⁶ Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism*, 141-142.

⁷ Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism*, 152-153.

with Tresmontant and John Paul. Although both of our postmodern representatives have strong disagreements with the views of Tresmontant and John Paul, it is necessary to draw out their distinctive approaches aimed at thinking from non-foundationalist perspectives.

The Elimination of Metaphysics

Marion initiates his attack upon metaphysics from the perspective of a defender of the sovereignty of God against those who would confine God to human finite categories thus actually worshipping in an idolatrous fashion rather than approaching the true God who is beyond any categories. Antonio Calcagno provides a concise overview of Marion's perspective as he comments upon *God Without Being*. He writes:

In his masterful work, *God Without Being*, Jean-Luc Marion launches a profound challenge to the tradition of metaphysics in general, and more specifically, to the related field of metaphysical theology. Marion claims that God must no longer be thought of in terms of the traditional category "Being," for that reduces God to an all too human concept which he calls "Dieu." In a sense, a violence is done to God and our understanding of God, for we seriously delimit that which by nature is indeterminable. Drawing upon a Heideggerian-inspired notion of the phenomenological *Destruktion*, Marion maintains that God must be thought outside the ontological difference and outside the very question of Being itself. In so doing, we free ourselves from an idolatry wherein we reduce God to our own all too narrow conceptual schemes.⁸

At the outset it must be noted that Marion presents quite a challenge to his uninitiated readers. The difficulty of the material is further complicated by his writing style. Robyn Horner, whose work we shall use for outlining much of this section, notes that "Marion's style is particularly taxing. It is very classical, a feature that is difficult to re-

⁸ Antonio Calcagno, "God and the Caducity of Being: Jean-Luc Marion and Edith Stein on Thinking God," paper presented at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, August 10-15 Boston, 1998.

move in translation while attempting to remain faithful to his text, and tends to progress in spiral rather than linear fashion, which means that it is sometimes initially difficult to distinguish between his exposition of others' ideas and his own, frequently contrasting views."⁹ To enter into the world of Marion one must first learn the esoteric speech that he employs while elaborating his themes. In some respects this new language is appropriate given his aim of moving beyond metaphysics. A good deal of the classical language is so replete with metaphysically charged language, such as essence, nature, substance, person etc., that in order to complete his task Marion must create a new way of speaking. At times this language more closely resembles poetry than prose, a point that I shall return to later in this chapter.

In commenting upon Marion's desire to eliminate metaphysics, Guarino reminds us that at least some part of Marion's fascination with the *via negativa* is deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition. He mentions the statement of Aquinas that "we do not know what God is, only that he is and how he is related to us" (SCGI, 30). He further quotes Gregory Nazianzen who observes that "what God is in nature and essence no man ever yet has discovered or can discover" (*Orations* 28, 17). Guarino further explains:

Theology, by the very nature of its formal object, the triune God, is largely, though not entirely, an apophatic discipline, one that only cautiously intermingles presence and absence; the great theological tradition of Christianity has recognized this unreservedly. Marion, like Derrida, Caputo, and others, is interested in nonappearance, in the absence from which presence comes to light. From a theological point of view, one certainly cannot argue with this marked accent on unknowing or even nonappearance, for theology harbors intense elements of the apophatic, the apocalyptic, and the eschatological at the heart of its own self-understanding.¹⁰

⁹ Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), x.

¹⁰ Thomas Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005) 52.

God Without Being

Undoubtedly Marion addresses a legitimate concern by weighing in on the side of the otherness of God, of the unknowability concerning his essence. He provides a healthy reminder that our theology is always an attempt on some level to grasp the intangible, to conceive One beyond our most noble intellectual effort. While attempting to accomplish such a feat, Marion has chosen a provocative name for his work, *God Without Being*. At first hearing this may give the impression that he is asserting the non-existence of God. Marion assures his reader that this is not the case in the preface to this work. To clarify his belief in God he writes that “God is, exists, and that is the least of things. At issue here is not the possibility of God’s attaining Being, but, quite the opposite, the possibility of Being’s attaining to God.”¹¹ Statements like this may help even those critical of Marion’s work to admire his apophatic aims. The question is, does he go so far in this pursuit as to skew the reality he wishes to protect?

The project that Marion attempts in order to pursue his aim of freeing God from all “Being” language and thought is what puts him at odds with the vast majority of theologians throughout history who have attempted to use categories which they have received from the Fathers as well as the Scholastics. As Horner describes it, the postmodern project, of which Marion is certainly a part, has two primary aims. The first is overcoming metaphysics, and the second is “thinking of difference.”¹² These are the goals that directly bear upon our focus upon both Tresmontant and John Paul, both of whom insist upon the necessity of metaphysics.

¹¹ Marion, *God Without Being*, xix-xx.

¹² Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 15.

Since the elimination of metaphysics is high on the postmodern agenda, typically ontology is off limits. The “being” questions that were entertained by previous generations of philosophers and theologians have been largely abandoned or rendered pointless and/or unachievable. This turning away from ontology is felt on many levels as a part of the modern academic milieu. Within the scientific community a similar avoidance of ontology has at times caused the contemporary person to relinquish his or her unique status in the cosmos. As Richard Barrett puts it, “the idea that a frail biological being on one planet in one star system, is the centre of the metaphysical universe, seems ridiculous to many of our contemporaries.”¹³ We have what Christos Yannaras has described as an ontological embarrassment. “The rejection is quite easily explained. Ontology is associated with intellectual arrogance and dogmatic inflexibility grounded in medieval thought.”¹⁴ It may also be referred to as an ontological fatigue. In light of this postmodern perspective we can see why Marion has shunned a good deal of the classical and traditional language. It is much too imbued with ontological baggage. He seeks to distance himself from this in order to rethink questions of God and Being.

Tracy notes that within modernity there are two main strategies. The first seeks a correlation between “the claims of reason and the disclosures of revelation. The other strategy believes that reason functions best in theology by developing rigorous concepts and categories to clarify theology’s sole foundation in revelation.”¹⁵ Marion is decidedly on the side of the second strategy. He, like many postmodern thinkers,

¹³ Richard Barrett, “The Survival of Reason: Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*,” *Blackfriars* 81.955 (September 2000): 361.

¹⁴ Christos Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁵ Marion, *God Without Being*, x.

finds correlation unachievable. This is the result of the postmodern focus upon the particular, which always sees the difference and disallows the universal. Those opposing this postmodern perspective may object that correlation is unachievable only inasmuch as one uses as a starting point modernity and its fluctuating points of focus rather than looking towards what is universally graspable through the use of reason.

Marion's position is that revelation is the only legitimate starting point for undertaking Christian theology. This develops into a number of meditations upon themes which are both theologically and phenomenologically derivable. In the end Marion hopes to move us to think of God in terms of goodness over being, a goodness rooted in agapeic love.

Before exploring the themes investigated by Marion which make up the heart of his philosophical and theological opus, one more brief excursus is needed. As Marion is the postmodern descendent of notable philosophers before him it is appropriate that we consider how some of these thinkers have influenced him.

Kant, Nietzsche and Heidegger

Like both Tresmontant and John Paul, Marion had to encounter and assess the thought of Kant. Marion's reading of Kant was perhaps not as dramatic as that of John Paul or others. He was convinced of the ability of the phenomenological method, and was not troubled by dismissing notable thinkers whom he found misdirected. This resulted in his dismissal of Kant. Guarino notes how in seeking a phenomenology without horizons, "Marion unleashes against the transcendentalism of modernity because phenomenology,

unlike Kantianism, 'no longer limits itself to sensible intuition, but admits all intuition that is primarily donative.'"¹⁶

Marion's invective against metaphysics follows in the line of thought of Nietzsche. Nietzsche sides heavily against metaphysics as a false construct that has been heavily built upon and wrongly invested in for centuries in the West. The framework, according to Nietzsche, is unable to withstand modern scrutiny. In the face of an indifferent universe all that is left is the Will to Power.¹⁷ This collapse of metaphysics and its structural proclivities results in the death of God according to Nietzsche. Bruce Ellis Benson writes that "Marion affirms Nietzsche's famed account of the death of God, but takes it in the opposite direction of the death of God movement of the 1960s. For Marion, that death is not the death of a living 'god' but the death of the 'god of the philosophers.' Such a death signifies the end of any theology or philosophy (or, more technically, metaphysics) that attempts to make positive determinations of God. Like Nietzsche, Marion sees both philosophers and theologians as often 'idolatrous' in the sense of creating God in their own image and postulating God as the highest 'being.'"¹⁸ Horner notes that Heidegger will take this anti-metaphysical ambition even further. Inasmuch as Nietzsche sought to overcome metaphysics, "Heidegger will, in fact, judge Nietzsche to be the culminating figure of a certain type of metaphysics, since even Nietzsche espouses a value, that of the Will to Power."¹⁹ For many, the thought of Heidegger put the final nail in the coffin for metaphysics. However, this end brought about a new beginning as far as Marion was

¹⁶ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 54.

¹⁷ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 35.

¹⁸ Bruce Benson, "Jean-Luc Marion Tests the Limits of Logic," *The Christian Century* (8 February 2003), 22-23.

¹⁹ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 36.

concerned. Bloechl writes, "for Marion, the end of philosophy recognized by Heidegger is simultaneously the (re)emergence of the current nature of certain phenomena that have never been submitted themselves to onto-theology - above all, the divine word...the startling conclusion must be that the end of philosophy would be a new beginning for theology."²⁰ Ignace Verhack, in light of this Heideggerian perspective, asks a question that logically comes to mind. If one buys into Heidegger's system, is it possible to even have "God" as a theme for philosophical discussion?²¹

Marion and Phenomenology

Marion is a phenomenologist. He is convinced, like Husserl, that a naturalist approach to the world is insufficient, as it tends to focus on *objects* within reality, and lacks a sufficiently subjective focus. This type of approach neglects a consideration of consciousness, which is undeniably a part of the whole. In asserting this point Horner quotes Husserl who states "only a radical inquiry back into subjectivity-and specifically the subjectivity which *ultimately* brings about all world-validity, with its content and in all its prescientific and scientific modes, and into the 'what' and the 'how' of the rational accomplishments-can make objective truth comprehensible and arrive at the ultimate ontic meaning of the world."²² It seems that Husserl's phenomenology is insufficient for Marion on a couple of fronts. It is lacking in its ability to deal with the lofty subject matter contemplated by Marion. As John D. Caputo has noted, "for Marion, Husserl's phenomenology has allowed itself to be preoccupied with what Marion calls 'poor' or com-

²⁰ Jeffrey Bloechl, "Preface," *Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), ix.

²¹ Ignace Verhack, "Immanent Transcendence as Way to God: Between Heidegger and Marion," *Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl, 107.

²² Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 24.

monplace phenomena in which the intention exceeds or outreaches the givenness, whereas Marion analyzes the possibility of a phenomenon that is impossible on Husserl's terms, where the givenness exceeds the intention, swamps and saturates it with givenness and leaves it groping for words (meanings, significations)."²³ Benson further explains the dissatisfaction that Marion has with Husserl's approach to phenomenology.

But Marion- ever the radical- contends that even Husserl didn't go far enough. For Husserl still thinks that there is a kind of "horizon" (i.e., a background) against which all phenomena appear. In other words, when I see a person or object, I always see that person or object in relation to a background (and this includes a cultural and even historical background).

Not only does Marion want to do away with that background (or at least suspend it), he also claims that the phenomenon of the Logos (not to mention other phenomena) appears to us as a "saturated phenomenon." In other words, they're so much that we can never get our puny little minds around it. The Logos simply defies our categories and ways of making sense of things.²⁴

What Marion thought deficient in previous attempts at philosophy and then in phenomenology he believes he has at last achieved to some extent. He writes that "What was lacking was a non-metaphysical method of philosophy- phenomenology... It took twenty years for me to hope to succeed, at least in part. And in fact, *Etant donné*, with the inventory of saturated phenomena, completes, in the particular case of the phenomenon of Revelation, a sketch of what *Dieu sans l'être* bluntly intended through direct recourse to theology."²⁵ Marion's aim is to take phenomenology to a new level by employing new terms arrived at by key insights into phenomena. Horner concisely presents five funda-

²³ John D. Caputo, "Derrida and Marion: Two Husserlian Revolutions," *Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl, 120.

²⁴ Benson, "Jean-Luc Marion Tests the Limits of Logic", 23.

²⁵ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 105. From Marion, "Preface to the American Edition," *Being Given*, ix-xi, ix.

mental arguments offered by Marion pertaining to phenomenology. They are here presented in a slightly modified form:

1. The phenomenology of Husserl at various points opens onto the possibility of exceeding metaphysics.
2. The proper horizon of the phenomenological reduction is neither presence (Husserl's reduction), nor being (Heidegger's existential reduction), but givenness (Marion's reduction).
3. Givenness implies an emphasis on the self givenness of phenomena, and the consequent recognition that the subject is not first a constituting I but a screen upon which phenomena become visible.
4. Some phenomena offer so much to intuition that they cannot be definitively constituted; these phenomena are saturated by intuition (hence, "saturated phenomenon"). They include events, idols, flesh, and icons, but potentially also phenomena of r/Revelation.
5. Phenomenology is a kind of philosophical prolegomenon. It opens onto theology as it can provide a non-theological context for the consideration of phenomena that are given in excess of our ability to constitute them, which might include revelatory phenomena.²⁶

Marion's conviction is that phenomenology is not *a* way of approaching philosophy, but *the* way of engaging the world of experience. Since the philosophy of the past is an exercise in metaphysical reflection, lacking the sufficient phenomenological insight, it should for the most part be laid aside. Horner explains the three ways in which Marion believes metaphysics has been overcome. First, it displays an inability to adequately deal with the infinite as evidenced by the work of Descartes. Second, the works of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida have shown metaphysics to be a meaningless pursuit. Finally, Metaphysics has been overtaken by phenomenology which surpasses it in its ability give an account of the world.²⁷ In each of these three ways Marion is convinced that metaphysics has been overcome, but it is the third way which provides a context out of which to properly and fully contemplate love.

²⁶ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 106.

²⁷ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 106-107.

Marion and Aquinas

Given the above perspective, Marion's encounter with Thomism is apt to be confrontational. For many, Thomas represents the height of metaphysical ambition. This was certainly, at first, the case for Marion. The 1982 edition of *Dieu sans l'être* blamed Thomas for advancing the idolatry of onto-theology. Guarino notes that within this work "Marion argues there that the notion of being purveyed by the scholastic tradition exchanges the iconic representation of God, eminently displayed by the Pseudo-Dionysian trajectory of love and unknowing, for the more objectified, calculative, and idolic trajectory of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. ... seeing being as a category encircling both God creatures and, therefore, as representative of the 'idolic imagination.'"²⁸ Brian J. Shanley presents a similar argument in his fine article which attempts to disentangle the conflict that Marion had/has with Aquinas. He also recounts Marion's initial complaint against Thomas from *God Without Being*:

There Marion had argued that by reversing the Pseudo-Dionysian priority of the good over being in his doctrine of divine names, Aquinas had moved fatally away from the God of Revelation and faith, who is fundamentally Love, towards the construction of the metaphysical idol of "God" who would come to dominate modern thought. Marion's original verdict on Aquinas was that he was not significantly different from Avicenna and John Duns Scotus insofar as he accorded primacy to a human concept of being (allegedly tainted with the representational limitations of the imagination) as the horizon that dominates and determines the way in which God can appear; moreover, this conceptual priority could only be univocal and so the alleged Thomistic analogy of being collapses. God is thus objectified and subordinated to human conceptualization, the beginning of the development that would flower into modern onto-theology."²⁹

²⁸ Thomas Guarino, "Fides et Ratio: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism," *Theological Studies* 62.4 (December 2001): 683.

²⁹ Brian J. Shanley, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Onto-Theology, and Marion," *Revue Thomiste* 95.1 January-March 1995: 192, 08/02/07 <<http://www.thomist.org/journal/1996/964AShan.htm>>.

The remainder of the article goes on to explain Marion's recantation of his earlier assessment of Aquinas and his subsequent rehabilitation of Thomistic thought. As Shanley writes, "In the 1991 'Preface to the English Edition' of *God without Being*, Marion held out the possibility that Thomistic *esse* may not be the being from which God needs to be liberated, identifying the latter instead with both the conceptual and univocal being of modern metaphysics and Heidegger's *Ereignis*.³⁰ Marion suggested that Thomas does not chain God to metaphysics because the *esse divine* maintains a transcendent distance from the composed (*esse-essentia*) order of beings that is the subject matter of metaphysics (*ens commune*)."³¹ Marion is able to offer this *retractatio* inasmuch as his further reading of Thomas has led him to conclude that Aquinas did in fact avoid the pitfalls of onto-theology. Shanley succinctly presents Marion's argument as to how Thomas avoided these fatal mistakes. Marion begins by pointing out the flaws in Heidegger's indictment of metaphysics as ontotheology. First, God must be conceived as falling within the subject matter of metaphysics, as a Being among beings falling under a univocal concept. Second, "God must be efficient causal foundation of beings and is their sufficient reason." And thirdly, "God as ground must be *causa sui*, supremely grounding precisely because self-grounded."³²

Marion contends that Aquinas is innocent on all three counts. He asserts that Thomas does not include God within his metaphysical system. Thomas' metaphysics is concerned with *ens commune*, and God is related only as the principle of *ens commune*. A developed understanding of Thomas' analogy of being has allowed him to ascertain

³⁰ Consult the following section for a concise overview of the position of Thomas as opposed to that of Duns Scotus and William of Ockam. W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001), 52.

³¹ Shanley, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Onto-Theology, and Marion,".

³² Shanley, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Onto-Theology, and Marion,".

how Aquinas avoided onto-theology. Although Aquinas escapes fault in this area, Marion nonetheless blames the misunderstanding on those developers of Thomas who came after him and distorted his original intent. As concerns the second requirement, Marion makes the claim that Aquinas' teaching on causality is more nuanced and is best understood within the framework of creation. This causality of God must not be strictly tied to efficient causality. Shanley further explains Marion's position when he writes that "creation implies a unique and transcendent kind of origination that is not locatable within some larger conceptual framework provided by all-encompassing univocal notions of being or causality as in subsequent onto-theological schemas."³³ And finally, Thomas avoids any notion of God as *causa sui*. This fact Marion believes is evidenced in the deep belief of Thomas that the self causation of *esse* is incoherent. Further, Marion makes known that in the arguments for the existence of God, God himself is exempt from the principles of causality.

After Marion's rehabilitation of Aquinas it may be asked if Thomas is adequately reflected in Marion's portrayal. This treatment by Marion may indeed establish that Aquinas escapes many of the earlier indictments leveled at him under the three metaphysical problems mentioned by Heidegger, but does this new portrayal of Thomas accurately reflect his thoughts as regards the possibility of metaphysics? An Aquinas without metaphysics is indeed a stretch. One can recognize that Marion has grown in his understanding of the thought of Aquinas, but deciding that all future Thomistic studies should be viewed through the lens of Marion and postmodern thinkers would certainly draw a negative response from many Thomists.

³³ Shanley, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Onto-Theology, and Marion,".

Although Marion has seen his way clear to exonerate Thomas in this one respect he has not gone so far as to see the merits of metaphysics as it concerns all reality other than God. He is set on moving past metaphysics on all fronts. Additionally, having corrected his original reading of Thomas he nonetheless remains skeptical of Thomism. As Guarino mentions, “while Marion’s thought continues to undergo modifications, his original suspicions about the use of ‘being-language’ when speaking about God still inform a good deal of his work.”³⁴ I believe Guarino’s concluding remarks adequately reflect a respect for the work of Marion, yet point out how Thomas not only engaged in a discussion of God by way of the *via negativa*, but positively asserted that concepts may aid in our understanding of God. Marion may choose to focus upon God as gift, but Aquinas would “insist that even this transcendent and sovereign Gift truly ‘is’ and so exists-and is intelligible-even if ultimately beyond our understanding.”³⁵

But while denying that concepts can offer comprehensive knowledge of God, Aquinas insists that they have some role in designating him. There is a limited intelligibility afforded by the “pure” perfections such as goodness, wisdom, and love. Such intelligibility is demanded by the very belief in God’s manifestation to us, by the faith of the Church in the mediating role of creedal and doctrinal statements. Such statements must have intelligible content if Christian doctrine is to be anything more than a mere cipher of God’s existence. Aquinas engages analogy, then, precisely as a “form” to aid in the intelligibility of the impossible gift of revelation. It is not a totalizing form; it clearly respects the balance between presence and absence that is essential to Scripture, the creeds, and Christian doctrine. It need not even be the only or exclusive form, but it is perhaps the best form for intelligently explaining in the dyad of manifestation and hiddenness inherent in Revelation itself.³⁶

At times it seems that Marion’s desire to avoid traditional thought leads him to new difficulties. For example, while trying to liberate phenomena and allowing it to fully

³⁴ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 251.

³⁵ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 252.

³⁶ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 252-253.

reveal itself, while removing all constraints, Marion will go so far as to rebuff logic. He states that, “as we know, theology contradicts logic.”³⁷ Now this brief utterance in the midst of a larger treatise on the openness required of phenomena deserves greater attention than can be given here, but it does indicate a willingness to take his thought in whatever direction he sees fit regardless of how it relates to the well established rules of thought which are part of the heritage of the Christian faith. It is not only logic, but also the legitimacy given to the principle of non-contradiction that Marion takes issue with.³⁸ I mention these two points as they stand in notable contrast with John Paul and *Fides et Ratio*. Logic, Sufficient Reason and the Principle of Non-Contradiction are asserted by the Pontiff as indispensable to philosophy. Although Marion does not provide an explanation for his understanding of the principle of sufficient reason, he obviously sees it as a confining principle. At times it seems as if Marion views metaphysics, including governing principles, as an unnecessary imposition upon reality rather than an explanation of the working of things. Even in undertaking a study of the divine, certain principles may be applied to God not as a constraint, but as an explanation of His very being. Asserting the intelligibility of the world can be a tribute to God as an indication of the positive outpouring of Truth that follows upon creation. Once one takes the necessary precautions, as Thomas has done, conceptual thinking may arguably be the most fruitful path for intellectual achievement. Marion, on the other hand in seeking to reformulate our thought may be calling for what is “unnatural” to the human person. Certainly the model offered in Christian revelation, most especially the Gospels, does not refrain from using concepts in the process of trying to understand God. In other words, as Marion is very clear about the

³⁷ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 201.

³⁸ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 85. Marion, “The Idea of God,” 265-304, 291-292.

primacy of revelation does he in fact take seriously enough a biblically based model which does not forgo the use of concepts?

Thomas wisely couples negative and positive theology in a manner respectful of the sovereignty of God and respectful of the intellect of human persons. As Shanley notes:

[Marion has an] exclusive emphasis on the *via negativa* at the expense of the *via causalitatis* and the *via eminentiae*. While Marion is right to argue that the apophatic side of Aquinas needs to be retrieved in light of the Heideggerian critique, he ultimately pushes that interpretation interpretation too far. Marion's reading simply cannot be reconciled with Aquinas's position that certain terms can be predicated of God positively and substantially (though non-quidditatively) through analogy. At the risk of oversimplification, it seems that once again analogy is at the root of Marion's misunderstanding of Aquinas. For all of his progress on analogy, Marion still seemed somewhat under the spell of Scotus in so far as he continues to construe analogy as an account of how formal concepts can apply to God rather than as an account of the lived use of language in religious affirmations.³⁹

It is worth noting, that the apophatic tradition, while maintaining an esteemed place within Christian theology, has never stood alone, but has been coupled with positive theology. This is in line with much Catholic theology, which considers the bringing into play of a both/and type of an approach as opposed to an either/or as most fruitful.

³⁹ Shanley, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Onto-Theology, and Marion,". As previously noted, Clarke helps to explain the historical context for the misunderstanding of Thomas. Scotus and Ockham advocated "the univocity of the concept of being against Thomas...and since their metaphysics were 'essentialist,' i.e., focused on being *as essence* (not including the act of existence as part of its content), it was hard for them to see how the concept of *being* could be applied to different essences without breaking up into several distinct concepts ceasing to have the same meaning at all." Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 52.

*The Idol and the Icon*⁴⁰

Only by reading Marion's sustained reflections may one be brought more closely to an understanding of his philosophical and theological perspective. Although no introduction is sufficient to get to the heart of Marion's thought I will offer one author's attempt that may provide a framework for the topic. Calcagno offers as clear an account of Marion's Idol and Icon comparison that one can find. He writes:

Both idols and icons are not beings, but they indicate a "manner of being of beings." An idol, as the Greek root (eidô- I see) suggests, has to do with vision and the visible. Idols, like the great statue of Athena overlooking the Piraeus of an ancient Athens, were designed to be looked at, they are the objects on which we fix our gaze. Their splendor and brilliance command our attention. The idol tries to capture what is unique about a deity. What makes the idol visible, however, is not the idol itself, but our gaze upon it. "*Le regard fait l'idole, non l'idole le regard.*" It is our intentional act of viewing the idol that empowers the idol itself. The divine is anthropomorphized by our gaze upon the idol, for it is we who decide what to see as unique (das Einzige) to the idol. In other words, we create the divinity. God becomes trapped in our gaze. God becomes a concept in that He/She is seized (capere) by and confined to our own understanding. In so far as God is reduced to our own conceptual categories and understandings, God no longer has Her/His own identity, it is superimposed. Our concepts of God become idolatrous and that they limit an essentially indeterminable being to our own understanding. God is made a concept, a "Dieu".⁴¹

To avoid idolatry Marion sets within his sights what he considers the "first idolatry."

"The first idolatry can be established rigorously starting from metaphysics to the extent that its essence depends on ontological difference, though 'unthought as such' (Heideg-

⁴⁰ This section deals primarily with the theme of the idol from a theological perspective. Horner notes that whereas Marion's views towards the idol are predominantly negative in this regard, his later works, which take on a more phenomenological perspective, tend to view the idol more favorably, as "saturated phenomena." This move on the part of Marion may provide a more favorable point of departure in the future for viewing word/concept/presence. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 125-126.

⁴¹ Calcagno, "God and the Caducity of Being: Jean-Luc Marion and Edith Stein on Thinking God,"

ger).”⁴² Marion believes that the concepts employed by metaphysics take the place of the One who is beyond categorization. Subsequently, our attempt to think God or worship God from within these categories results in an idolatrous act, one that is an encounter with a god of our own making.

The icon, in contrast to the idol, “refers not to the viewer, but beyond itself; the icon is a visible reference to the invisible. Nevertheless, Marion argues that in making this reference, the icon does not thereby contain it...What is clear is that the image is not intended to reduce the original to its own dimensions, but allows us to move through its contemplation to the worship of the invisible God”⁴³ It is hard not to see the beauty and reverence of such a reflection. It stands as a stark reminder that the God of Judeo-Christian belief is beyond us, beyond our categories. And yet, as we have pointed out St. Thomas’ theology offers a view of analogy which frees him of this charge of idolatry.

At the root of Marion’s wish to dismantle metaphysics stands the challenge of some (like Heidegger and Nietzsche) who feel they have dismantled the “God of metaphysics.” Marion is then coming to the rescue and is hoping to put in place of this “god of metaphysics” the God of revelation. This God is so far beyond concepts that he is rendered “undismantable.” Much of the crux of this debate is centered on whether one thinks that traditional metaphysics in general, and Thomism specifically, is able to escape the accusations leveled against them by Marion and some other postmodern thinkers. Certainly Thomists like Norris Clarke hold that a modified Thomism is sufficient to meet the challenge. Clarke is convinced that Heidegger’s lack of familiarity with existential Thom-

⁴² Marion, *God Without Being*, 33.

⁴³ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 62. Marion, *La croisée* book IV.

ism was problematic.⁴⁴ Had Heidegger encountered the “remembrance of being” present there, the state of modern philosophy might have been quite different.

And yet, if metaphysics were reinstated and the arguments of its detractors were overcome, would the work of Marion have any merit? I think yes. Its apophatic perspective is a welcome counterpart to positive theology. The contribution of Pseudo Dionysius and the *via negativa* continue as necessary within the heritage of Christian theology.

The reflection upon the idol and icon bears fruit. One can worship a god of one’s own creation. In this meditation Marion places the emphasis upon the other. “For Marion, the icon also functions as a locus for a significant reversal. What is made visible in the icon is the gaze of the invisible other, who looks at my gaze, or whose look crosses my gaze.”⁴⁵ Instead of gazing upon the idol as an act of ego, gazing upon the icon is a transcendent exercise which focuses upon the other and empties the ego. Horner mentions that here we find Marion displaying the influence of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Balthasar’s theological perspective includes a belief that what is important is not “our experience of God, but God’s experience of us.”

As Marion has progressed in his understanding of Thomism, and has admitted as much, the next question is whether or not Marion can concede one of his most central convictions, the absolute need to eradicate from the language of theology all concepts referring to God? This in fact is central. He writes:

But as the idol can exercise its measure of the divine by concept, since the gaze as well can invisibly reflect its own aim and in it dismiss the *invisible*, the icon also can proceed conceptually, provided at least that the concept renounce comprehending the incomprehensible, to attempt to conceive it, hence also to receive it, in its own excessiveness. But precisely, *can* such concepts be conceived? The only concept that can serve as an in-

⁴⁴ Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 27.

⁴⁵ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 63. Marion, *God Without Being*, 18.

telligible medium for the icon is one that lets itself be measured by the excessiveness of the invisible that enters into visibility through infinite depth, hence that itself speaks or promises to speak this infinite depth, where the visible and invisible become acquainted.⁴⁶

Although ambiguous, this statement seems to indicate that Marion is willing to allow for concepts only in a manner in which concepts are devoid of positive meaning. When a concept tends towards establishing an affirmative attribute of God, especially as this relates to being, it must be dismissed as idolatrous. Any thinking in which being appears is overly confining and is inappropriate for God. As Verhack writes, “Even more than Heidegger, Marion emphasizes the functional character of the ‘metaphysical’ conception of God. According to Marion, not only is a grounded being the highest, but the highest, by virtue of its *function* as final ground, is itself grounded by the being-or, more specifically, by and from the being in its need of a ground. This *logical-functional* character of the metaphysical conception of God would be the reason why the metaphysical conception of God must be abandoned, in order to prepare the way for ‘a more divine god.’”⁴⁷

This total stripping of affirmative meaning from concepts is in the end counter-productive. Continuing with the image provided by Marion, the icon is distinguished from the idol, and appears to be different as a consequence of the intention present in the gaze. It is nonetheless a medium with positive content. Although the icon is spoken of as a window to the transcendent, it is not clear glass, but contains substance. Icons in their own way require and follow rules or patterns of conceptual construction. The color, form and symbol employed are not haphazardly concocted. This point could be further drawn out. Perhaps the emphasis lies on the intention of the one gazing. If this is so I think it fair

⁴⁶ Marion, *God Without Being*, 22-23.

⁴⁷ Verhack, "Immanent Transcendence as Way to God: Between Heidegger and Marion," 108.

to ask if an intentional acknowledgement of the limitations of conceptual thought on the part of those engaged in conceptual positive theology is enough to keep them from idolatry?

Marion's desire to leave the realm of ontology leads him to another consideration. As Oliver Davies puts it, "Marion finds his difference which is 'indifferent to ontological difference' in an ontology of creation. It is this creative principle which ensures that 'being and non-being can be divided according to something other than Being', thus 'outwitting' or deflecting beings away from Being, and towards the 'gift.'⁴⁸

The Gift

In order to escape the confines of metaphysical thought once again, Marion attempts a reflection upon *gift*. These brief presentations of Marion's major motifs admittedly do not do justice to the beauty and nuance contained within them. These presentations are instead aimed at giving voice to Marion so as to provide a minimally adequate grasp of his reasoning for launching an attack upon metaphysics.

Davies defines Marion's gift "as a non-metaphysical principle, which is expressive of free, divine donation that resists all manipulation, appropriation and contamination by gaze- or human-centered perspectivalism."⁴⁹ Note once again that Marion's desire is to protect the divine from violence by way of human action or belief which would go beyond the apophatic approach. Horner provides three significant insights into Marion's treatment of Gift which further elucidates this point. First, "the gift of God is only given within withdrawal; there is a relationship, in other words, between gift and

⁴⁸ Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 151.

⁴⁹ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, 151.

abandonment (the two movements of one distance).” God’s absence is indicative of the process which takes place in the interaction of giver, gift and receiver. This dwelling upon distance “enables Marion to imagine a giving (of God) that would not be an appropriation.”⁵⁰ Second, “Marion explains that the gift traverses distance only in order that, in withdrawing, the giver can be ‘read on the gift.’”⁵¹

This distance once again is stressed by Marion as a necessary portion of an interaction with God that does not allow for our laying hold of him. Third, “the gift is itself no-thing, that is, no thing other than the capacity to give: ‘to receive the gift amounts to receiving the giving act, for God gives nothing except the movement of the infinite kenosis of charity....’”⁵² With this notion of gift one thing is certain: it does not sound like fun at the Marion house at Christmas! A question that may be asked of Marion in relation to this explanation of giving and the gift is, does God in fact deliver?

On the other hand, Horner notes that John D. Caputo’s reading of Marion asserts “that Marion’s commitment to the givenness of God also implies a commitment to God’s ultimate, if not conceptual presence.”⁵³ What distinguishes Marion from Derrida is a givenness that is present in Marion which is lacking in Derrida. Verhack is helpful in taking this reflection upon gift to its next level. He writes the “the gift, says Marion, liberates by its indifference with respect to being/beings. Ultimately, the gift also liberates *itself* from being; it liberates itself as it were from its own engagement in the delivery of

⁵⁰ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 72-73.

⁵¹ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 73.

⁵² Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 73. Referenced from *The Idol and Distance*, 166.

⁵³ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 134.

being. How can it do this? By exercising itself as gift in the name of what *comes after it* and is greater than it. According to Marion, this is ‘charity itself.’”⁵⁴

Guarino also draws out the distinctions between Derrida and Marion as they relate to the gift. As both believe that we must maintain an openness to the “totally other,” the “impossible” who can shatter what we think as possible, “for Derrida, the impossible never comes; it never has an actual presence.” It is here that these two thinkers part ways. “For Marion, on the contrary, the impossible is not that which structurally can never come. It is, rather, excess and saturation; it is the gift par excellence, the gift which overflows every attempt to “comprehend” its givenness, to be fully understood.⁵⁵ Examples of these *saturated phenomena* are birth, death, love, etc., those experiences which leave us speechless and grasping for concepts and words. This ultimately leads Horner to describe what Marion is attempting to achieve as an experience which “defies the capacity of the recipient to present it as any *thing*.”⁵⁶ Once again one may ask whether this renders concepts useless or just limited?

Love

Marion’s motifs conclude in a reflection upon love, and it is precisely here where one finds the culmination of his thought. Horner begins her presentation of Marion’s view of love by quoting from his 1970 work, *Amour de Dieu, amour des hommes*, where he states “Love alone is worthy of our faith. The revelation that Christ brings, that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:18) shows us not only what we can know... but, moreover, how we can

⁵⁴ Verhack, "Immanent Transcendence as Way to God: Between Heidegger and Marion," 110.

⁵⁵ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 53-54.

⁵⁶ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 30.

know... Love constitutes the content as well as the advancement of faith.”⁵⁷ She further points out that “God’s first name is love (not being), love is the content of revelation, and revelation is only to be known by loving; this is essentially Marion’s complete theological manifesto.”⁵⁸ She then asks of Marion key questions which are also pertinent to other motifs which he employs. How is one to know? What is it that one knows? Marion places himself in a precarious position by stripping from his system any connection to concepts. One way that he attempts to answer such questions is to make the distinction that is found in French as well as other romance languages, of the two words used for knowing (*connaître* and *savoir*). The knowledge that Marion proposes that we have of God is non-conceptual, not thought, but rather received.⁵⁹ It is more an act of the will than of the intellect. What Horner goes on to explain is that for Marion the choosing for or against God is a choice that is non-rational in that it transcends the ability of intellect. Here love possesses its own logic in the act of love. Marion even goes so far as to call it an “insane” choice for or against God.

For many this pushes one to the limit. The very pertinent question remains, who is the God to whom you offer love and worship? Given the pluralism that is now familiar to all, this is a just question. Knowledge of history and of world religions clearly establishes that all are not worshipping the same God. The demands of Yahweh are not the demands of Moloch or Baal. Does this abandonment to an “unknown God” extend to Christians alone? If it is extended to all, do creedal differences in fact matter? Stripped of conceptual distinctions one is left in obscurity. For Marion, this obscurity may in fact be a welcome “cloud of unknowing,” but without the counterbalance of a positive conceptual the-

⁵⁷ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 66.

⁵⁸ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 66.

⁵⁹ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 67.

ology there is only confusion. With this in mind one may sympathize with the conceptually replete work of Frank Sheed in his *Theology and Sanity*. There he states that “it would be a strange God Who could be loved better by being known less.”⁶⁰

Although Marion takes his name for God from scripture, he seems to forget that Christ himself speaks of “God” in conceptual terms. This term seems undeniably conceptually charged and yet is employed by Christ himself. Even the metaphysically charged term most avoided by Marion, that of “I AM,” is used by Jesus as he hints of his own identity.⁶¹ It may again be asked if by choosing one name, that of love, Marion does damage to a larger portrait of God which is able to include all the scripturally and divinely revealed names for God. Once again the either/or approach impoverishes the theological heritage. Marion is unable to allow the metaphysician the legitimate breadth of treatment that he or she may actually have. From his *In Excess* he writes, “The theologian’s job is to silence the Name and in this way let it give us one- while the metaphysician is obsessed with reducing the Name to presence, and so defeating the Name.”⁶² Calcagno interjects that Marion is able to level such accusations since he has never justified his reading of the metaphysical tradition, but instead has claimed his reading of metaphysics as axiomatic.⁶³

Even as Marion finds the “I AM” the weakest of names, not all find it so. Pope Benedict XVI sees in this name a revelation that in the end stands against idolatry as an expression of the one name in contrast to the many. He writes:

⁶⁰ F. J. Sheed, *Theology and Sanity* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1947) 9.

⁶¹ See John 8:58 (Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.), as well as other verses in this chapter which indicate how Jesus uses the “ego eimi” to reveal his identity.

⁶² Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 212. Taken from Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002) 157-162.

⁶³ Calcagno, “God and the Caducity of Being: Jean-Luc Marion and Edith Stein on Thinking God,”

The mysterious name of God, revealed from the burning bush, a name which separates this God from all other divinities with their many names and simply asserts being, "I am," already presents a challenge to the notion of myth, to which Socrates' attempt to vanquish and transcend myth stand in close analogy. Within the Old testament, the process which started at the burning bush came to new maturity at the time of the Exile, when the God of Israel, an Israel now deprived of its land and worship, was proclaimed as the God of heaven and earth and described in simple formula which echoes the words uttered at the burning bush: "I am." This new understanding of God is accompanied by a kind of enlightenment, which finds stark expression in the mockery of the gods who are merely the work of human hands (cf. Ps 115).

Bill Riordan points out that the names of Being and Love do not have to stand in contradiction, but in fact in the mind of Pope Paul VI were thought to express the very same reality. Paul VI writes:

We believe that this only God is as absolutely one in his infinitely holy essence as in his other perfections: in his almighty power, his infinite knowledge, his providence, his will, his love. He is "He who is" as he revealed to Moses... "He is Love," as the apostle John has taught us... so that these two names, Being and Love, express ineffably the same divine essence of him who, "dwelling in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16), is in himself above every name and every created thing and every created intellect.⁶⁴

The Positive Contribution

Guarino advances a number of reasons why Marion as well as other postmodern thinkers make a worthy contribution to the philosophical and theological project. He first notes that Marion, Levinas and others should be applauded for their determined attempt

⁶⁴ Bill Riordan, "The God of Being," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* C.6 (March 2000): 55. Paul VI, "The Profession of Faith of Paul VI (1968)" in *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*. Dupuis, J. (editor). New York, Alba House, 1996, 24. John Paul II then comments on this writing by Paul VI in his, *A Catechesis on the Creed: God-Father and Creator*. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1996, 118. " Paul VI made reference to the name of God, "I am who am," which is found in the book of Exodus. Following the doctrinal and theological tradition of many centuries, he saw in it the revelation of God as "Being" – subsisting Being, which expresses in the language of the philosophy of being (ontology or metaphysics used by St. Thomas Aquinas), the essence of God."

to help make theology digestible to postmodern thinkers who might otherwise reject a discussion of God dismissively.⁶⁵ Next, he commends postmodern thought in general for in that it “demands that theology maintain a sense of openness toward the unfamiliar and the ‘other,’ awakening us in the process to the ‘otherness’ of God, thereby rescuing us from latent rationalism, from theological Cartesianism, and from the ‘naturalism’ endemic to human experience. Postmodernism helps us live with contingencies and differences, correcting a provincial monism and warning us against a lapse into a univocity of thought or language.”⁶⁶ As concerns Marion specifically, Guarino offers two reasons why he believes that there is hope that Marion’s work can be incorporated into the greater theological tradition. First, he notes that Marion’s reevaluation of Aquinas gives evidence for some move towards opening to some type of first philosophy. This he believes in spite of the heavily apophatic reading of Thomas’ work. Second, He quotes Marion from his 1997 “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians,” in *The Postmodern God*, where he states that “phenomenology need not have recourse, at least in the first instance, to the notion of being or Being.”⁶⁷ Here Guarino places great emphasis upon the clause which states “at least in the first instance” to assert that Marion may be open to some foundation, as mentioned in *Fides et Ratio*, where John Paul calls for phenomenology to become grounded. And on a final note, Guarino points out what others have also said about Marion’s approach to theology. It reads at times more like poetry than prose. Poetry has its advantages, especially as it is employed towards the end that Marion has in mind. It is most useful in expressing the non-conceptual, and yet packs a punch. Marion, as has been noted before, seeks a new means of expression. Guarino

⁶⁵ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 260.

⁶⁶ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 340.

⁶⁷ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 53.

thinks this new expression is “curiously approximating the nonreligious aesthetic and poetic mysticism of Adorno and the later Heidegger.”⁶⁸ Once again I would ask if it is necessary for the poet to call for the elimination of prose? Could not Marion allow his work to be seen as a powerful reflection upon certain needed themes? Could he not stand as the apophatic poet of our times without having to be the voice that eliminates all others?

Challenges to Marion

To begin with, not everyone who is engaged in truth-seeking in the modern age has accepted postmodernism and its axiomatic principles of thought. What Marion is attempting to do is so rooted in postmodern thought that it may be forgotten that there are other philosophers who attempt to meet the challenges posed by contemporary thought in other ways. They may not find it necessary to entertain the solutions posed by Marion. Postmodern thinkers tell us that we should rejoice in varied unconnected voices, but not everyone is satisfied with this approach. Horner mentions the criticism offered by David Harvey who states that, “obsessed with deconstruction and delegitimizing every form of argument they encounter, they can end only in condemning their own validity claims to the point where nothing remains of any basis for reasoned action. Postmodernism has us accepting the reifications and partitionings, actually celebrating the activity of masking and cover-up, all the fetishisms of locality, place, or social grouping, while denying that kind of meta-theory which can grasp the political-economic processes ... that are becoming ever more universalizing in their depth, intensity, reach and power over daily life.”⁶⁹ Horner offers an alternative and more sympathetic assessment of postmodernism. She

⁶⁸ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 59.

⁶⁹ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 14.

states, that “on the other hand, if it were to be recognized, not that there is no meaning, and not that there is every meaning, but that making meaning involves judgments, choices, and decisions, then deconstruction could bring us to the point of discerning the ethical and appreciating the nature of faith.”⁷⁰ Though this may speak to postmodernism in general, what of Marion? He is unapologetically in favor of not only doing away with metaphysics but with our very thought as it has been traditionally conceived. As previously noted, Marion advocates distance in relation to God which does not permit of a correspondence of concepts with reality.⁷¹ Guarino, who gives a fair hearing to Marion, also offers a cautionary note:

The danger with Marion is that one suspects his condemnation of metaphysics and his concomitant interest in Dionysian thought, in agapic and mystical theology, leads to an assertion of Christian truth shorn of an intelligible structure. Theology is about “unknowing” and about “gift,” but any attempt to secure this logically, even *a posteriori*, as an exercise in the *fides quaerens intellectum*, seems nothing more than an unwarranted rationalism that ultimately obscures and occludes the mystery of the given (divine) phenomena.⁷²

In addition, Guarino makes mention of the position of *Fides et Ratio* concerning a call for foundation. Marion stands squarely in opposition to the encyclical.⁷³ Barring the argument from authority, Guarino asks some penetrating questions. “Does Marion allow the truth of Christian doctrine, and the classical characteristics predicated of it, to be theologically sustained? Is it enough to say that it “appears” to men and women of all ages and

⁷⁰ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 45.

⁷¹ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 51.

⁷² Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 52-53.

⁷³ Thomas Guarino, “*Fides et Ratio*: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism,” *Theological Studies* 62.4 (December 2001): 675-700.

cultures without asking about the very nature of human beings and their ability to grasp abiding meanings and enduring truth within cultural and conceptual change?”⁷⁴

A few others pose questions to Marion. Bruce Benson thinks the attempt to change the entire direction of our thinking and to eliminate all concepts is dangerous and inadvisable. “What’s much more worrisome is whether there is something inherently problematic with the project itself. Does Marion’s reduction to pure givenness obliterate the very conditions that make it possible to understand and appreciate that which is given? Put in a theological context, does the revealed Logos break through as a “pure phenomenon” without any horizon? Or does that Logos depend upon the context of, say, Old Testament prophesies for its very identity (at least for us)?”⁷⁵

Calcagno thinks that Marion fails in a number of key areas. I will mention two of them here. The first concerns whether he addresses causality properly. “Even though Marion reads history very narrowly by pointing to God as *causa sui*, he never carries out the implications of cause and effect in relation to our own being in the world. ... We know by experience that we are not the cause of our own being. Traditionally, metaphysicians view this as signifying that the being of creatures must have been ultimately caused by a first cause or creator. ... We are analogously related to God existentially. God transcends us, but is also immanent. This is articulated in the *analogia entis*.” Secondly, Calcagno thinks that Marion ignores the various ways Christians have traditionally spoken of knowing God. He points out how Edith Stein wrote of three ways in her small essay, *Ways to know God*. She includes “natural knowledge, Revelation and personal experiences of or encounters with God.” Natural knowledge would of course be limited.

⁷⁴ Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, 55.

⁷⁵ Benson, “Jean-Luc Marion Tests the Limits of Logic,” 25.

This is indicated in the distinction drawn between philosophy and theology. He writes that “for Thomas and the Mediaevals, there was an hierarchy of knowing, especially as related to God. One cannot help but wonder if Marion has created an apparent, artificial lacuna in the metaphysical tradition where one need not exist in the first place, for love and being are compatible, but to be thought within the framework of different levels of knowing.”⁷⁶

From a quite different angle Davies asks of Marion whether his placement of Goodness over Being is indeed sustainable? He writes, “it is only through implicit self-possession that we can ground the possibility of kenotic goodness. If a virtuous act is to put ourselves at risk for the sake of another, then some degree of self-possession as self-awareness is intrinsic to that act.”⁷⁷ In other words he is asking if goodness, at least as pertains to us requires the primacy of being over goodness. How would such a reflection apply to God?

A few more questions come to mind. How are we to understand the course of Christian history and tradition in light of Marion’s analysis? Traditionally the Church has seen in the encounter with Greco-Roman thought the providence of God. Are we to believe that from Pseudo-Dionysius until Marion we have been engaged in idolatry? Certainly the philosophical and theological work that has taken place since that time would represent a wrong turn for Marion. Next, I have been struck all through Marion’s work with the questions that are not addressed. These are the philosophical questions that fall within the tradition of metaphysics and can not be answered without recourse to this science. For instance, in *In Excess* Marion treats the topic of *flesh*. Horner states that for

⁷⁶ Calcagno, "God and the Caducity of Being: Jean-Luc Marion and Edith Stein on Thinking God,"

⁷⁷ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, 8.

Marion, “flesh gives the *ego* to itself; there is no experience of *I* that is not given as flesh. It is also the sole means by which the world is phenomenised.”⁷⁸ In other words there is a treatment of the “one and the many” in some form. Can one call for an end to metaphysics and then fall back upon its questions and proposed categories? In addition, upon reading Marion it is fair to ask if both the esoteric language and non-conceptual thought end up in a form of Gnosticism. That is, does he claim to know what it is that limits God? His thought seems a far cry from the parables offered by Jesus himself which were understandable even to the Galilean fishermen. His “pure” apophaticism seems unrelated to the enfleshment of God in history.

There is one final point of interest brought out by Edith Stein by way of Calcagno concerning God’s revelation in the “I Am” of Exodus. Stein thinks this reflection upon being (God’s Being) is insightful. She states that the Mediaevals saw in such a revelation by God not an indication that God was a “being” or that he existed, but that “this pronouncement on the part of God is to be interpreted as God saying that God fully is and admits no non-being (Nichtsein). God is a positivity, a plentitude (Fülle).” And second, the “I Am” is “actually God identifying Himself/Herself as ‘*Sein in Person*,’ Being in person.”⁷⁹

So the purely negative, apophatic emphasis, apart from a cataphatic focus, like that of Stein, leads to a God of the abyss, not to a God of plentitude. The negative may be necessary, but it is always appropriately linked to the fullness of God. One may experience the dark night, but the splendor of the beatific vision has the last word, not the darkness. In addition, no one lives in total darkness. Reflections of the good, the true, the

⁷⁸ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 127.

⁷⁹ Calcagno, “God and the Caducity of Being: Jean-Luc Marion and Edith Stein on Thinking God,”

beautiful and unified are unavoidable. A focus upon a God of plentitude of being can allow one to find glimpses of the divine in such things.

Section 3: Gianni Vattimo

Gianni Vattimo was born in Turin on January 4, 1936. He studied philosophy at the University of Turin, continued his academic pursuits, and was influenced by the work of two notable professors, Karl Löwith and Hans-Georg Gadamer. He was first named assistant professor at Turin in 1964 and professor of Aesthetics in 1969. He later became Professor of Theoretical Philosophy in Turin in 1982 and since that time has become a noted speaker and activist.

I intend in this section to present another anti-metaphysical thinker whose perspective can be considered alongside Tresmontant, John Paul and Marion. Vattimo's thoroughly postmodern philosophical approach has much in common with Marion. He too advocates a non-foundationalist, non-conceptual perspective. With Marion, he calls for the elimination of metaphysics. He likewise finds the current hermeneutical concerns offered by many postmodern thinkers indicting enough to warrant the end of the metaphysical thought of the past. His thinking, more so than Marion's, has been heavily influenced by Nietzsche, and how this influence is born out in his philosophy and theology will be explored.

Even though Vattimo and Marion swim in the same pond they are notably different fish in important ways. They both draw from the same postmodern vision of the world and suggest a similar path for the future, however, their methods and emphases are

different. Both clearly envision a similar world for Catholic thought in the future, and both claim at root to be non-foundationalist.⁸⁰

Vattimo and Postmodernism

Vattimo characterizes the current climate within religious life, after its contact with postmodern philosophy, as profoundly tentative. He tells of how this has played out in his own life, how he moved from a boyish adherence to Church belief and practice to a more liberated and postmodern perspective. He pursued his university education with the goal of developing a new Christian humanism. After encountering the works of Jacques Maritain and the neo-Thomistic movement, he wrote on Aristotle for his doctoral thesis. He later encountered Nietzsche and Heidegger, both of whom exerted a considerable affect upon his thinking.⁸¹ This study eventually culminated in the construction of a postmodern philosophy uniquely his own. It is based on the conviction that:

It may be possible to say that the epoch in which we live today, which is rightly called postmodern, is the epoch in which reality can no longer be conceived of as a structure solidly tied to a sole foundation that philosophy would have the task of knowing, or perhaps that religion would have the task of adoring. The pluralistic world in which we live can not be interpreted by an ideology that wants to unify it at all costs in the name of a sole truth, which some academic disciplines would have the task and capacity of knowing.⁸²

Concerning a metaphysical starting point he states that “for much of the twentieth-century it is no longer possible to think of Being as foundation....” Vattimo attributes this loss of foundation to a number of causes, both related to historical developments in the

⁸⁰ Guarino, "Fides et Ratio: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism," 685.

⁸¹ Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 2.

⁸² Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 5.

modern era. The first is the recognition of a kinship between foundational thought and totalitarianism, the dangers of which are only too apparent at this point in history. The second reason is found in our discovery and contact with other cultures, an encounter which leads to the third factor, the abolition of a unilinear history. As we gain an understanding of these newly found peoples and their historical narratives, we confront the need to overcome a linear, Eurocentric understanding of the world.⁸³

Vattimo and Metaphysics

Paul J. Griffiths points out that Vattimo is the Italian counterpart of the American Richard Rorty. Although of differing philosophical and religious traditions, they agree substantially upon the place of metaphysics within modernity. Griffiths writes concerning the elements upon which they agree:

The first element in the story is that metaphysical thought—also called "onto-theology," "realism," "objectivism," and so on—has been decisively abandoned by the West. The abandonment of metaphysics, as Vattimo puts it, is the form of thought that corresponds to our epoch. Next comes the claim that this now-abandoned metaphysical thought is incompatible with democracy and the exercise of civic responsibility and virtue. And finally there's the claim that religion, though slow to achieve this, is moving inexorably in the same post-metaphysical direction: away from being a contributor to the ordering of the public sphere, and toward being a private comfort that may foster civic virtue.⁸⁴

In agreement with Marion, Vattimo sees the abandoning of metaphysics as the logical outcome of our coming to grips with philosophical progress in the West. Vattimo finds that the author who most clearly explains this movement within the history of philosophy is Wilhelm Dilthey. "Dilthey retraces two stages within the history of European meta-

⁸³ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 4.

⁸⁴ Paul J. Griffiths, "The Future of Religion by Richard Roty and Gianni Vattimo," *First Things* (June/July) 2005: 38.

physics: the ancients and that of the moderns. The latter was destined to end with the dissolution of metaphysics accomplished by the Kantian critique and its developments up to Dilthey's historicism."⁸⁵ Vattimo continues, "Dilthey writes that whereas metaphysics as a science has become impossible, 'the metaphysical [sic] element of our *life* as personal experience, that is, as moral-religious truth, remains...but experiences of a person's will are exempt from a universally valid presentation, which would be coercive and obligatory for every other intellect."⁸⁶ It does not take much deducing to see that the concept of truth here proposed is more fluid than has been traditionally presented. This concept of truth will be fleshed out a bit further in another section.

Griffiths explains how Vattimo characterizes our overcoming of the metaphysical captivity of the past in light of the logic of the incarnation. "In Vattimo's view it is something intrinsic and proper to Christianity: God's self emptying incarnation began a process that gradually emptied Christianity of metaphysical lusts, with the result that at least for right-thinking quasi-Catholics like himself, Christianity can now be understood exhaustively as a 'call to practice.'"⁸⁷ Vattimo explains the presence of metaphysics within Christianity as attributable in part to the neo-Platonism of Augustine. "But the endurance of metaphysics in Augustine, as in all Church fathers and medieval thinkers, may be understood above all in light of the social and political responsibility the Church had to take over after the fall of the Roman Empire. ... Furthermore, the Church developed into a rigid structure, which was unavoidably grounded on an objectivist metaphysics and on scientific knowledge's claims about the natural world-as Galileo's case shows."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 106.

⁸⁶ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 109.

⁸⁷ Griffiths, "The Future of Religion by Richard Roty and Gianni Vattimo," 39.

⁸⁸ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 108.

Vattimo does not believe, however, that the Church cultivated its metaphysical position, especially as concerns its naturalist ethics, in an attempt to retain control over temporal matters. Instead, he argues that these positions are the outgrowth of a hierarchical, authoritarian system. Once one is encouraged to free philosophical inquiry, which he believes is advocated in *Fides et Ratio*, metaphysics will slowly be abandoned. He concludes:

To return to the main argument, violence found its way into Christianity when Christianity made an alliance with metaphysics as the “science of Being as being,” that is, as the knowledge of first principles. The reasons for this alliance and the circumstances behind it are many, beginning with the responsibilities the Church inherited from the dissolution of the Roman Empire, as the only remaining temporal power. Another reason is the classical identification of Christian existence with the philosophical existence: the human being can realize humanity fully by rising to the knowledge of the first principle (following the model of Plato and Plotinus), to be taken up into it.⁸⁹

Vattimo claims as his goal the dissolution of metaphysics. He defines it as "the dismissal of all doctrines, which claimed absolute and definitive values as the true description of Being's structures."⁹⁰ He takes as his model in this postmodern period, Joachim of Fiori, a controversial charismatic figure of the 1200's. Joachim saw the unfolding of history as taking place in three stages. These three stages were, law, grace, and a more perfected state of grace. Vattimo sees in the end of metaphysics both a sign and goal which is now taking place within the third stage. This final stage would be characterized by an emphasis upon "not the letter but the spirit of Revelation."⁹¹ This end of metaphysics results in a new exposure to culture and pluralism which calls for interpretation rather than objective

⁸⁹ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 117.

⁹⁰ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 19.

⁹¹ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 29-31.

accounts of reality.⁹² Vattimo asserts that the overcoming of metaphysics does not entail a better truth superseding previous truth, since that would amount to another type of metaphysics. Rather, "metaphysics and metanarratives end because they are no longer necessary or credible, like the moral God who, in Nietzsche, dies because the faithful themselves recognize that he is a superfluous lie."⁹³

Vattimo and Weak Thought

What Vattimo proposes in place of metaphysics is what he calls "weak thought." Weak thought (*pensiero debole*) is what Vattimo describes as the simple recognition that in light of the postmodern condition of the world (mentioned above) we are no longer able to speak as if we had certain knowledge as was done in the past. This weakening is called for in response to the insights of both Nietzsche and Heidegger, who believed that "the metaphysical tradition is the tradition of 'violent' thinking."⁹⁴ A hermeneutical stress on meaning derived from interpretation in conjunction with a broad exposure to culture and histories sustains this conviction. "What I intend to argue is that the West is essentially Christian to the extent that the meaning of its own history appears as the "twilight Being," that is, the diminishment of reality's solidity through all the procedures of dissolution of objectivity brought about by modernity."⁹⁵ This movement has a positive result, according to Vattimo. "The dissolution of metaphysics generates an openness to religious

⁹² Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 15.

⁹³ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 89.

⁹⁴ Gianni Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference*, trans. Cyprian Blamires and Thomas Harrison (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 5.

⁹⁵ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 77.

experience in the philosophical thought, culture, and collective mentality of our society."⁹⁶

Vattimo and Nietzsche

Since much of Vattimo's thought is rooted in Nietzsche⁹⁷, a brief excursus into the thought of Nietzsche (inasmuch as it affects Vattimo's view of metaphysics) is in order. Vattimo was first influenced by Nietzsche as he encountered his famous announcement that "God is dead."⁹⁸ This pronouncement, explains Vattimo, is not an atheistic claim. To make such a claim would indicate one's ability to access absolute truth. Nietzsche makes no such claim. Instead, the God who is dead is the moral, metaphysical god. In other words, God (at least the god who has been proclaimed and known up till this point) is superfluous.⁹⁹ Nietzsche's contribution is then a welcome one. As the concept of God that Vattimo struggled with was eradicated, he was then free to consider alternative understandings of God. Vattimo certainly acknowledges the validity of religious experience, and was heartened by Nietzsche's writings.

My argument is that, if philosophy recognizes that it can no longer be atheistic because the collapse of the metanarratives of metaphysics, it can

⁹⁶ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 26.

⁹⁷ Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 33. The following quote from Vattimo is very helpful as to his attachment to both Nietzsche and Heidegger: "I am aware that I have a preference for Nietzsche and Heidegger in part (or perhaps above all) because, over against other philosophical projects that I have come across, their thesis, based on a given interpretation of their work, seems to be above all in harmony with a specifically Christian substratum that has remained a living part of me. Moreover, that it has become present again is due at least in part to the fact that, having distanced myself from the Christian inheritance (or so I believed), it was above all with the writings of Nietzsche and Heidegger that I spent my time and in their light that I lived and interpreted my existential condition in late-modern society. In short: I have begun to take Christianity seriously again because I have constructed a philosophy inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger, and have interpreted my experience in the contemporary world in the light of it; yet in all probability I constructed my philosophy with a preference for these authors precisely because I started with the Christian inheritance, which I have now found again, though, in reality, I had never abandoned it.

⁹⁸ Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference*, 164.

⁹⁹ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 3.

find in this awareness the basis for a critical position on that turn to religion and its dangerous fundamentalist features....To sum up: since philosophy no longer has reasons for justifying atheism, it must grant some legitimacy to religious experience, though only in so far as it recognizes the end of metaphysics.¹⁰⁰

In light of the above, I think it fair to say that Vattimo is an extremely ardent proponent of the end of metaphysics. For this reason, both he and Marion stand in stark contrast to the thought and work of both Tresmontant and John Paul.

To further explain how the nihilism of Nietzsche is reconciled with Vattimo's belief system which extols the religious experience I turn to Ashley Woodward. According to Woodward, Vattimo "is one of the few theorists to develop a detailed account of the connection between nihilism and the postmodern. Vattimo's Nietzsche therefore stands as a useful figure of thought for determining the connection between nihilism and the postmodern."¹⁰¹ Nietzsche himself defined nihilism as "the radical repudiation of value, meaning and desirability."¹⁰² In part, the nihilism of the postmodern age is related to the concept of history that was previously mentioned. In light of the plurality of histories, Woodward explains three reasons why Vattimo believes that unilinear history has ended. First, history represents a selective perspective. Secondly, the old systems which controlled the mandated perspective have been overcome, giving voice to those previously silent. Third, in contrast to initial fears that the spreading of media world-wide would result in a monolithic voice, the opposite has in fact occurred. The explosion of the media

¹⁰⁰ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 88.

¹⁰¹ Ashley Woodward, "Nihilism and the Postmodern in Vattimo's Nietzsche," *Minerva- an Internet Journal of Philosophy* 6 (2002), 20 February 2007 <<http://www.ul.ie/~philos/vol6/nihilism.html>>.

¹⁰² Woodward, "Nihilism and the Postmodern in Vattimo's Nietzsche,"

has resulted in a fragmented view of reality as a result of the plethora of voices which embody it.¹⁰³ It is this entire process which has culminated in the postmodern worldview.

Woodward's conclusion explains why Vattimo embraces the nihilism of Nietzsche, and how the overcoming of unilinear history and foundational thought can be positively viewed. Woodward exposes the nihilistic features that Vattimo finds positively appealing.

These features are, firstly, that nihilism cannot be thought as a unilinear history, and secondly that the simple *overcoming* of nihilism, thought as a *new era* or a *new foundation*, cannot be an adequate response. Nihilism in its postmodern manifestation is complete nihilism. The way to "overcoming" the negative aspects of nihilism is not to overcome nihilism itself—thought as foundationlessness— but to change one's attitude towards it. Postmodernity can be seen as a nihilistic society on Vattimo's analysis because history has ended; the West has lost its grounds for historical meaning. The pluralistic proliferation of alternative knowledges, beliefs and values coincides with the breakdown of any shared meanings and values to act as common social ground. Postmodern society, too, is foundationless. Postmodernists such as Vattimo embrace nihilism, however, rather than seeing it as a challenge to the validity of their theories and values, because they embrace foundationlessness, seeing the tissue of erring as the essence of reality. Rather than searching for a new foundation, postmodern nihilists are content to continue 'living the errant in the light of a fundamentally different attitude.'¹⁰⁴

With a dismantled ontology, where does Vattimo go from here? He moves from ontology to event. Vattimo claims that the rediscovery of event is the rightful reclaiming of the Judeo-Christian tradition. For Vattimo, event is a continuing process, and "the history of salvation takes place through the events of modernity, and possibly of its crisis...."¹⁰⁵ He stands in contrast to the approach of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Lévinas who

¹⁰³ Woodward, "Nihilism and the Postmodern in Vattimo's Nietzsche,".

¹⁰⁴ Woodward, "Nihilism and the Postmodern in Vattimo's Nietzsche,". The Vattimo work cited at the end of the paragraph: Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*, trans. John R. Snyder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 171.

¹⁰⁵ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 41.

seek to answer the questions arising at the end of historicist modernity by proposing a God who is "wholly other." He opposes this approach because he believes it relies too heavily on a metaphysical understanding of Being, as well as failing to take seriously the dogma of the incarnation. Instead he writes, "the way out of modernity cannot be found by retrieving the concept of Being as stable and eternal-suprahistorical structure-but rather by thinking, more radically, of Being as event."¹⁰⁶ This in some ways bears resemblance to Marion's elaboration upon God as givenness, but presents problems once again as we are asked to conceive of God in a manner foreign to most Christians. Vattimo's "God/Event" seems quite different from the Judeo-Christian God as traditionally conceived.

*Vattimo's Biblical Understanding*¹⁰⁷

Far from dismissing the biblical contribution to this discussion, Vattimo asserts that it is postmodernism that has allowed a rediscovery of the Scriptures in the spirit they were meant to be received. The new "God" of postmodern thought is admittedly not the God once referred to, but is more authentic. He writes that "true, it is not the God of metaphysics or of medieval scholasticism. But that is not the God of the Bible, of the book that was dissolved and dismissed by modern rationalism and absolutist metaphysics. ... we become aware that once we discover that the vision of Being as eternal structure of objectivist metaphysics is untenable, we are left with the biblical notion of creation,

¹⁰⁶ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Vattimo, *Belief*, 58-62. These pages provide an overview of Vattimo's approach to the scriptures. In his estimation they are in need of a radical reinterpretation in light of a postmodern understanding of hermeneutics.

namely with the contingency and historicity of our existence.”¹⁰⁸ Vattimo does not do much to establish this point other than make this assertion. Certainly one would have to give answer to the argument of Tresmontant, that in fact there is a biblically derived Christian metaphysics. And secondly, the metaphysics of Aquinas, though not always offering a proof text for each portion of his works, is rooted in a deep knowledge of Sacred Scripture and was developed in strict accordance with this vision.

Vattimo comes to his biblical understanding after developing a theory of biblical interpretation. This is the locus of all the various readings that can be extracted from those pages throughout history. Vattimo begins by condemning the reading traditionally understood by the Church, which he considers a literal interpretation. Instead he presents his case for a reading of Scripture which is in accord with the postmodern age. “My argument is that our epoch must be treated as the age of the spiritual interpretation of the biblical message. The active presence of the Christian heritage is recognizable only if the literal, and authoritarian, interpretation of the Bible is abandoned.”¹⁰⁹ What Vattimo understands as the “spiritual interpretation” is forthcoming, but his reference to the Christian heritage is problematic. Certainly an historical overview of scriptural interpretation would not show evidence of the type of interpretation advocated by Vattimo, at least until somewhat recently. Where might this heritage be found if one chooses to dismiss authoritative teaching? Perhaps the heritage might best be found among the Church’s saints. This may be conceded by some who may even deny any legitimate exercise of authority of the Church to pronounce upon scripture. Yet even a “survey of saints” would scarcely produce the type of interpretation advocated by Vattimo.

¹⁰⁸ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 46-47.

For Vattimo, the history of interpretation is in process. As Vattimo has stated, “the history of salvation and the history of interpretation are much more closely tied to each other than Catholic orthodoxy concedes.”¹¹⁰ Even granting the one time event of salvation in the coming of Christ, Vattimo calls for an evolving interpretation of scripture. “The history of salvation continues as the history of interpretation in the strong sense in which Jesus himself was the living, incarnate interpretation of Scripture.”¹¹¹ In other words, the Church has been given the Scriptures, they are to be continually reinterpreted by the Church, and the Church above all is the community of believers.¹¹² This results in an ongoing process of continual interpretation. In the end, the truth that is sought in scripture as well as in philosophy and theology is to be found through a process of consensus.

Vattimo acknowledges that not every interpretation is of course valid, but what is needed is a community of interpreters.¹¹³ Lacking a foundational view of truth, “universal validity of an assertion can be constructed by building consensus in dialogue.”¹¹⁴ This consensus is only possible in light of the dissolution of metaphysics and the allowing of a plurality of voices, both sacred and secular. Although Vattimo is quite adamant regarding gaining the truth by communal consensus, it can be asked, “what of the Church through time as the community that has called for and conceded to foundational truth?” Vattimo’s view relies on a particular reading of history, and selects the voices he allows to be heard.

¹¹⁰ Vattimo, *Belief*, 49.

¹¹¹ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 61.

¹¹² Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 8-9.

¹¹³ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 67.

¹¹⁴ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 5.

Section 4: Conclusion

At the heart of much of the cultivation of “weak thought” is a desire to counter what is perceived as the violence that has marked our history. Vattimo displays a concern that the violence he perceives is derived from Metaphysical convictions. One has only to read his chapter heading, “Violence, Metaphysics, and Christianity” to have an idea of the role metaphysics play in this equation. He links the violence with the “desire to reach and be taken up into the first principles.”¹¹⁵ As Vattimo sees it, all identification between law and nature results in metaphysical violence. This describes in his view the vast history of the Church as related to matters of morality, especially sexual morality. Metaphysics is here blamed inasmuch as it is the foundation of absolutes. This type of thinking must be abolished in order to arrive at true freedom.¹¹⁶

In chapter Five I intend to respond to some of the larger issues surrounding the clash between foundational thinking and postmodern thought. Included in that treatment will be more pointed remarks concerning Vattimo, and I will address in particular an issue he raises concerning ecumenism. It is especially interesting as it is a topic of much concern to the past two Popes. As part of Vattimo’s call for a weakening of thought he cites *ecumenical progress*. He writes that “charity has replaced the traditional conception of what truth means.”¹¹⁷

Both the late John Paul in *Ut Unum Sint* and the present Pope, Benedict XVI have been strong proponents of ecumenism, and yet have called for dismissal of a “soft ecumenism” that glosses over true differences. Instead they both called for true dialogue

¹¹⁵ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 113.

¹¹⁶ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 114-116.

¹¹⁷ Vattimo, *After Christianity*, 50.

(even on the toughest issues), a dialogue based in love, but uncompromising on the truth.

Logic requires, at least for those who adhere to its force, that the work involved with seeking the truth means holding to certain positions and the abandonment of others.

Here I am reminded of something Socrates said to Phaedo. In their earlier conversations, many false philosophical opinions had been raised, and so Socrates says: "It would be easily understandable if someone became so annoyed at all these false notions that for the rest of his life he despised and mocked all talk about being – but in this way he would be deprived of the truth of existence and would suffer great loss." The West has long been endangered by this aversion to the questions which underlie its rationality, and can only suffer great harm thereby. The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur – this is the programme with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time.

-Pope Benedict XVI¹

CHAPTER FIVE: EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Section 1: Introduction

In this chapter I have the challenge and task of bringing together divergent voices. No longer is it possible in our current climate to hold an all-inclusive conversation in a single academic language. Postmodern thinkers are quick to point this out, much to their credit. Instead, we are faced with the challenge of speaking to one another in the hopes of sharing one common element, reality. Even this, or most especially this, poses difficulties. And yet, our very attempt to share reality as we understand it with each other is a testament that we do indeed think this task a worthy one.

In the first chapter I presented some preliminary definitions and explanations of metaphysics. I believe if nothing else, I have pointed out the crucial work which metaphysical study endeavors to accomplish. Those in favor of it, such as Tresmontant and John Paul, advocate for it as an essential component of philosophy in the Catholic tradition. Those we have chosen as representatives opposed to it, Marion and Vattimo, do so

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," *Meeting with the Representatives of Science* (The University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006).

with equal conviction and force. They see its pursuit as detraction. Certainly, what is at stake here is central. I will not attempt a solution that all might find agreeable. Instead I will offer a few modest reflections in light of the previous chapters. Perhaps the merit of such a project is in having to consider these divergent voices in close proximity.

In this final chapter I will place these divergent voices in dialogue in the following manner: to offer general reflections on the questions posed in the first chapter in light of encountering Tresmontant, John Paul, Marion and Vattimo, and to then focus on each thinker – with a mind to emphasize their contributions and problematic elements. Finally, I will offer some possible directions for further progress in metaphysics. Each of the venues proposed is offered not in a definitive way, but as a means to facilitate further consideration and dialogue as well as, I would hope, a movement towards a greater grasp of truth.

Section 2: Some Reflections

As was mentioned in the first chapter when referring to the possible division of metaphysics, there is no single partitioning agreed upon by all parties. In order to make a needed point here I will refer to the division used in Dulles' text. When metaphysics is broken down into ontology, cosmology, natural theology, anthropology and first principles, one thing is certain – more precise use of the word is needed when either promoting or debunking “metaphysics.” This is most especially true as concerns the writings of the postmodern thinkers who call for its end. Even this very desire on their part is to call for one specifically definable goal as opposed to another. In order to do that, or at least to realize its completion, non-contradiction and sufficient reason must remain intact. This also comes into play when debunking natural theology. Even if you think concepts inap-

appropriate to defining God, to even engage in any philosophical investigation requires the use of language *including* concepts (even if you intend to transcend them). This is true if we are to say anything at all of “being.” To disassemble the language of metaphysics requires the language of metaphysics (even if corrected and expanded). Among postmodern thinkers who intend to protest logic or the foundational principles of thought, one finds them needing these very tools to make their case. There are parameters of thought as there are limits to all facets of human life. To play within the boundaries does not necessarily limit, but is constitutive of the game.

As previously noted, it is not easy to place these thinkers in dialogue given the vastly different natures of their projects. To attempt to briefly convey what each thinker means by the term metaphysics may be of some use. I will try to condense the focus of each thinker towards this end. For Tresmontant, metaphysics refers to the foundational philosophical structure which underlies all worldviews. For John Paul, it is the foundational thought needed to anchor philosophy, theology and ethics. Although differing in some respects, metaphysics for both Marion and Vattimo may be thought of as an inherited, overly limiting systematic pursuit whose over-conceptualizations result in a presumptive understanding of the world. As concerns God, they would find such language a conceptual system which confines God through a lessening of the infinite by way of concepts. Admittedly, these are only sketches of their thoughts, but it does give one some introductory idea of how they differ even in their foundational understanding of what the science entails. If anything can be said of all four thinkers, it may be that they all intend to address the question of the absolute. Worthy of note is the fact that although John Paul and Tresmontant both stand as strong proponents of the metaphysical pursuit, each re-

gards and engages in metaphysics in a distinct way. Whereas Tresmontant sees metaphysics as the expression of a pre-existing structure present within Judeo-Christian thought, John Paul views metaphysics as the needed foundational underpinnings which will secure ethics and phenomenology. It is against this Thomistically based metaphysics, like that of John Paul, that we find Marion and Vattimo. Tresmontant may prove a more accommodating dialogue partner as he is not a representative of the school to which they are directly opposed. Tresmontant does not so much endeavor to construct a metaphysics as he extracts the characteristics of the Judeo-Christian worldview which he finds already present in revelation and offers a coherent portrait based on his findings. Coming from the side of the postmodern thinkers, Marion might be more accommodating dialogue partner for Tresmontant than Vattimo. Vattimo's proposed view of reading scripture may call into question the traditional reading from which Tresmontant draws.

In the first chapter I posed the question of whether, which and why certain metaphysical concepts should be retained in light of modern challenges. I believe on particular issues these thinkers stand at an impasse. Both Marion and Vattimo unequivocally call for the end of metaphysics. Although some concession may be made, most especially on the part of Marion, by and large I do not see the more committed postmodern philosophers and theologians embracing any pursuit of metaphysics whatsoever, at least consciously. I likewise see Tresmontant standing his ground. His project is in some ways unique, and therefore is not in direct line of the scrutiny posed by our two representatives of postmodern thought. John Paul, on the other hand, in his desire to bring together both the insights offered by phenomenology with the foundation found in metaphysics may indeed offer hope. The key would seem to be found in coming to grips with

the non-negotiable insights proffered by each thinker. Any good theologian will not, and rightly so, part with the gems of truth that they have gleaned in the course of their studies.

Section 3: Tresmontant Revisited

I believe the strength of Tresmontant's work is to be found in his unique approach which applies logic to biblical revelation and contrasts it with other philosophical systems. His ability to draw our attention to the unique contribution of Israel helps us to see it apart as a singular phenomenon. His insistence that not every metaphysical system is compatible with every theological system is well presented. The Biblical metaphysics posited by Tresmontant, one of universal comprehensibility, stands in stark contrast to the metaphysical alternatives offered by postmodern theology, more specifically, as encountered in this dissertation, that of Marion. It is worth asking whether the God of revelation, who came among us in the person of Jesus Christ speaking in parables, would be better represented by the thought of Tresmontant or Marion?

Tresmontant also rightly points out that even to speak of the world as other than the absolute requires metaphysics. In line with his methodology, Tresmontant draws attention to the fact that the first Vatican Council engages in cataphatic thought when it pronounces upon the divine attributes, in which a positive proclamation is made in light of God's revelation of himself within the Old and New Testaments. Also worthy of note, is the fact that Tresmontant, though certain of metaphysics, is not strictly speaking as part of the Thomistic tradition. He provides an alternative metaphysical route, one that may prove more accommodating to postmodern thinkers.

In his elaboration upon creation metaphysics, Tresmontant highlights particular oddities which must be accounted for. In line with his thoughts on continual creation is

his consideration of the continuing coming to be of persons. Tresmontant asks, “How can this be explained?” This question is an excellent springboard for future considerations, whether it be from the phenomenological or more traditional metaphysical perspective. Continuing in this vein is his awareness of the organization and origin of the coming to be of persons. His insight that organisms grow from a germ which is a unity may bring about new ways to consider the body-soul composite, which is the human person. The final insight concerning his focus upon creation involves his invocation of information theory. His conviction that creation communicates a message may spur on some level of dialogue between theology and the sciences.

Tresmontant points out that both an understanding of the problem of evil and the ability to grasp the concept of time require metaphysical thought. Certainly the traditional understanding of evil as a privation of the good of the created order, as received from Augustine, is hardly able to be cut loose from a metaphysical thought that centers on being. To move in another direction would require an entirely whole-scale rethinking of what we mean by evil. Time, according to Tresmontant, as the progressive coming to be of things is closely associated with this thought in the area of creation. He explains that time is the affirmation of continual coming to be of beings as opposed to a singular instance in which all that was to be all at once appeared. All of this thought is aptly considered to be properly within the realm of metaphysical thought.

Tresmontant, like Marion, elaborated upon the themes of both idolatry and gift, but in a very different manner. For Tresmontant, idolatry is not the applying of something human to God, but the taking of that which is divine and attributing or applying it to that which is created. Marion approaches it from the other side; he sees idolatry as our

applying to God something human, a concept, and worshipping this god of our own making. In either case, a continued exploration of the theme from both perspectives would prove worthwhile. The theme of being as gift, according to Tresmontant, is arrived at as a result of juxtaposing a free creating on the part of a wholly self-sufficient, wholly content God with that of beings coming to be as the necessary result of a cosmic play. Once again, side by side thematic interplay would prove interesting. Marion's highly complicated notion of gift has us contemplating gift as an experience of God in withdrawal. God has us recognize him in the gift, but not so as to be grasped by us. Tresmontant presents a more concrete vision as he presents creation as gift. The reader is to recognize the generosity of God as they grow in understanding of what it means that God chose to bring into existence that which can add nothing to his greatness.

The metaphysics of Tresmontant is a creation metaphysics. It is biblical and provides many advantages over other points of departure. It is, however, worth considering how a biblical metaphysics would develop if it were begun from a New Testament point of departure. From the Christian perspective the impact of the Incarnation was not and is not an isolated past event. Its impact has pervaded every fiber of creation. How would the Incarnation as a biblical starting point for metaphysics shape the work of Tresmontant? Perhaps his creation metaphysics needs only to be expanded to place emphasis upon the New Creation in Christ?

As another point of interest we may note that the historical approach of Tresmontant might cause it to be more appealing to a postmodern philosopher. Because Tresmontant's approach is rooted in scripture, it pays considerable attention to history. Future studies could do much to draw out the advantages of a metaphysics which is neither as

abstract nor as ahistorical as those which disturb many postmodern philosophers. This, as I have previously mentioned, is why I think it plausible that Tresmontant could help bridge the gap between metaphysical and non-metaphysical thinkers.

Tresmontant's metaphysical contribution provides much as it is unique, practically unexplored, Biblically derived and logically extended. Perhaps Tresmontant arrived on the scene at an inopportune moment in philosophical history, one in which many voices were vying to be heard. His, unfortunately, was not the loudest, for reasons which it may be beyond knowing. Perhaps the metaphysical fatigue which previously mentioned was beginning to set in and resulted in a setting aside of metaphysical study, not matter how persuasive its case. It was my hope that by reviewing his thought as pertains to metaphysics that I could come to recognize the value of his scholarly contribution. Admittedly, his work would have greatly benefited from critical review and scholarly challenges. As his work is predominantly unchallenged it stands worthy of further consideration. Those who encounter his work are often pleased and enthused by it. They may be struck by its clarity, simplicity and his logical exposé. Perhaps a reconsideration (or a primary consideration) of the contribution of Tresmontant is in order.

Section 4: John Paul II Revisited

As this dissertation seeks to take seriously the present phenomenological insights as well as the vast metaphysical tradition of Christianity, begun in the patristic period and continuing until today, John Paul rightly stands at the center of this work. Regardless of whether one finds his project successful, his desire to take seriously the phenomenological contribution while remaining a metaphysical realist is indeed praiseworthy. It is this

ability to find value in both pursuits that marks him as a significant intellectual in our times.

In the introductory section of Chapter Three it was noted that John Paul was concerned with the mystical element of theology. Although it was not dealt with in much detail, I think its significance is undeniably important. It may be this factor which allowed him to see a need for integration among what might at times seem incompatible phenomena, or the need to bring together phenomena and system. A systematic approach, like that found in scholasticism, may be criticized for being seemingly unrelated to experience, yet it is often underemphasized that systems are at least in part the result of experience. The experience brought to bear in systems is often the result of a vast array of experiences of people over a lengthy period of time. John Paul's desire to integrate all truth is commendable, and is an indication of a metaphysical mind, one concerned with the "*universus*." As briefly mentioned in the chapter, the mystical experience of Thomas did indeed have a great effect upon Thomas, however, its influence did not deter him from continuing to engage in the project of theological reflection. As compared to what is really "Real" our attempts may indeed seem as straw, yet in a confused and relativistic age, the straw may prove a great place to lay one's head. The Pope finds value in all of reality, the phenomenological, the metaphysical, as well as the mystical dimensions.

The personalism of John Paul is also noteworthy. He stands in marked contradiction to those systematic thinkers who are most concerned with system at the expense of the person. His emphasis upon the subjective marks him as a contemporary man. This is important at a time when the Church is in danger of becoming irrelevant to many sectors of society. However, his focus upon the person as locus of all truth refers to the person as

discoverer of truth, not creator of it. Once again he brings to bear a balance between the objective and subjective dimensions of truth. The focus upon the person is not only found in the phenomenology of our time, according to John Paul, but was also present in part even in the thought of Aquinas. John Paul cites Gilson, who saw in Thomas a theologian whose perspective considered the entire person, mind, will and heart.²

One area that marks a sharp distinction in differing camps of modern thought is found in the evaluation of nihilism given by John Paul in opposition to that of both Marion and Vattimo. For the Pope, nihilism is the culmination of a number of ideologies which he considers incompatible with Christianity, such as idealism, atheistic humanism, scientific positivism, pragmatism and eclecticism. For the Pope nihilism stands as a most detestable philosophical position. In contrast, both Marion and Vattimo speak of it as a most welcome position, one which provides a springboard for new and improved theology, devoid of metaphysics. The despair born of nihilism is the result of faulty thinking according to John Paul. In §46 of *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul calls to mind the aforementioned philosophies born of the Enlightenment, and believes that the affect that they have brought about has resulted in a confusion which has culminated in a philosophy of despair. In the mind of the pontiff, these misguided philosophies form a caravan. They have circled the wagons thus forming a moving circle instead of venturing forth towards truth. In other words, the advance of metaphysical thought has been corralled, not further explored in recent memory.

In §49, John Paul issues the much discussed statement that "the Church has no philosophy of its own," which is a predominant theme within this dissertation. Chapter

² His Holiness John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee, ed. Vittorio Messori (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994) 31.

Three attempted to make clear that I thought John Paul adopted Thomism as his personal philosophy of choice, as well as the affect it had upon *Fides et Ratio*. However it is important to keep in mind the larger point, which is, despite the leanings of John Paul or any successive pontiff, the Church is first and foremost committed to the truth of revelation. In as much as this is its task, all philosophies will be judged against this criterion of truth. As Chapter Three attempted to indicate, the Church only considers philosophies insofar as they explain reality in a way which coincides with divine revelation. So, the openness of the Church to new philosophical systems is limited by their ability to function as proper mediators of revealed truth.

In §39 and §72 we find John Paul's assessment of the Christian encounter with Greek thought and saw that it was predominantly in line with the thought of Tresmontant. He unequivocally states that when a philosophy is in contradiction to the content of revelation it is philosophy which must bend while retaining those elements of thought that are in harmony with revelation. As important as §39 is to the document, I believe §72 is most in need of serious reflection. In this section, what is asserted regarding God's providential plan in history has been shown far too little attention. Of the many reflections and criticism offered of *Fides et Ratio*, I have not come across one which focuses primarily on the role of providence in theological history. John Paul writes in relation to our Greco Roman heritage, "to reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his church down the paths of time in history." It is in this regard that I find the reflections of Marion and Vattimo wanting. To deny God's providential hand as it has been intimately involved in the Church through the past two millennia exhibits a lack of appreciation for the real and concrete ways that God has been active among his people.

Both Marion and Vattimo are properly concerned with Scripture, but not in the way in which the truths inherent in Scripture have been enhanced by the encounter of the Church with Greco-Roman thought. John Paul further asserts that this providential encounter continues on in our own day, and is thus not merely anchored in the past, but living in the present. The various systems of thought which the Church encounters today can be of benefit to the Church and aid in its understanding of revelation. This is true whether or not the content is congruent with revelation. It may help by providing a contrast which illuminates by contradiction. John Paul's phenomenological proclivities attest to his belief that the Church is to investigate ways of thinking unknown to previous philosophers and theologians.

Our present pontiff, Benedict XVI, has extended the thought of John Paul as concerns our providential encounter with Greco-Roman thought. In his Regensburg Address, he stated that the benefits derived from our encounter with Greek thought are perennially valid. He additionally posed a possible future course of thought for theology in light of Greek thought. He suggests that *L/logos* may be the appropriate point of convergence between biblical faith and Greek inquiry.³ One benefit garnered by this encounter provided the church with the language and understanding it needed while it delicately worked out defining matters of Christology and Trinitarian thought. Its terminology was considered adequate for use in previous conciliar teaching and theological expression. It also culminated in having a profound affect upon the language and thought of numerous saints and doctors throughout the history of the Catholic faith. If this metaphysically replete system of thought were inherently flawed, a charge which has been leveled against

³ Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections."

it, I hardly think it would have gone unnoticed for so long and by so many, *especially* by those saintly men and women whose wisdom surpassed the knowledge of their own time.

This further leads to another related topic. In §55, §65 and §66, John Paul, in line with Pope Pius XII, warns us of the danger involved in abandoning the traditional terminology of the Church. This seems to some very practical advice. Since a good portion of the terminology that is used in conciliar documents, official church teachings, the writings of revered theologians and doctors as well as the recently distributed Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church, may be considered scholastic in influence, what would it entail practically to entirely abandon this language or system of metaphysical thought? Additionally, how are theologians of the future to take on the task of adequately conveying a faith that is congruent with the past, without having had exposure to this terminology? Contained within our understanding of the faith are terms which carry with them very precise meanings that have, in some cases, been deeply thought over by previous councils or theologians. Take for example the teaching of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which has for centuries been taught explained and understood using the term transubstantiation. A proper and adequate understanding of the term substance is a prerequisite for considering this teaching. It may be countered that new and better ways of explaining real presence should be pursued. Allowing for this, if one is to be sure of conveying accurately the truth which was defined by transubstantiation in new ways, a knowledge of the scholastic linguistic system is in order. And so, practically speaking, it is a legitimate question to ask if the church is expected to continually modify its linguistic base as it approaches philosophies of the future. The metaphysical language amassed by the Church to date is quite substantial. Though neither Pius XII nor John Paul require the

continued use of traditional terminology, they nonetheless call for the theologian to be familiar with it. Even if the Church of the future chooses to discard this scholastically based language, must the Church deny the efficacy of the language as it was previously employed? It appears that some postmodern thinkers would be happy with nothing less than the wholesale removal of all terms which are derived from metaphysical thinking. To my mind this seems unreasonable and unnecessary.

Some ecumenical considerations may be appropriate to consider here. How is the Catholic Church to make ecumenical progress if it is tied to a scholastically based language which is not used by either the Orthodox or Reformed traditions? This question must be addressed as it has been reiterated numerous times in official Church teaching that the Church is unreservedly committed to ecumenical progress. This was the clear teaching of the Second Vatican Council, *Ut Unum Sint* and various other teachings of both John Paul and Benedict XVI. The future direction of the Church entails a linguistic challenge which cannot be ignored. There is no doubt that the language which each interlocutor brings to the table will be mutually enriched by continual dialogue and willingness to engage the other in their totality, including specific language, conceptual ideas and theological histories. This is best accomplished as each group contributes its insights to the wisdom of the other. This itself would prove very enlightening and beneficial for future ecumenical discussions.

As my concentration is specifically upon metaphysics we might here refine our focus. The Reformed tradition has not been as involved in the questions of metaphysics as has their Catholic counterparts who inherited the tradition of scholastic thought. Thinkers like Norman Geisler, an Evangelical philosopher, finds that Thomas is a wel-

come companion when dealing with philosophical questions. He makes what many believe to be a strong case for the Evangelical need for a Thomistic contribution.⁴ As for the Orthodox, perhaps the only solution would be to maintain parallel systems that while utilizing different language maintain a clear understanding of common meaning and history. This in fact might prove to be a beneficial way to keep from being so overly invested in a single system that it overshadows the truth which the system is meant to convey. It would also allow the unique beauty of each heritage, East and West, to continue to develop without being subsumed into the other. It is also worth mentioning, that their tie to the classical Greek thinkers also allows for much common ground.

As concerns John Paul's final assessment of the place of metaphysics for today and the future, I think it impossible to deny his unequivocal commitment to its continuation within the Church's philosophy and theology. Although he did not mandate a return to Thomistic metaphysics, he did call for a restoration of some form of metaphysics. This is certainly not the agenda of most postmodern thinkers. His insistence upon both metaphysical realism, as expressed in his *correspondence theory* of truth (*adaequatio*), and his emphasis upon a *philosophy of being* both unequivocally establish his position.

I ended the third chapter with some notes of admiration as well as challenges to the thought of John Paul. In conclusion, I find John Paul to be a formidable thinker and a man who set himself the task of thinking with the Church (in line with the *sentir con la iglesia* of St. Ignatius Loyola). He strove to be faithful to truth, especially as it is present in revelation, and as it was discoverable by the human mind. His philosophy was broad enough to embrace both phenomenology and metaphysical realism. It is too soon to draw any definitive conclusions pertaining to his comprehensive contribution to philosophical

⁴ Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).

and theological thought. As scholars critically grapple with his work we will most likely gain a growing, positive evaluation. For now his presence still looms large within the Church.

Section 5: Marion and Vattimo

Although the esoteric language of Marion may be off-putting upon first reading, once one comes to understand more deeply his project and the reasons for his unique way of speaking there is much to be gained by reading Marion. Upon contemplating the themes offered by Marion, I was struck by how each provided great insight into the mystery of God while adequately conveying his sense of “divine distance.” For example, the reflection upon the idol and icon was a stark reminder that theologians should be mindful of their use of language when attempting to illuminate divine mysteries. We must be careful in how we think about God, never allowing our concepts to confine the One who transcends all thought. We may too easily create a god of our own making, and idolize it through our gaze, thus replacing the God of revelation with a “fashioned” god. The apophatic way may have been too much forgotten at times, and Marion provides a good reminder of its benefits. Yet, I am perplexed by his desire to have the apophatic way as *the only* voice for theology. Thomas acknowledged the *via negativa*, yet was also was a proponent of cataphatic thought. To implement Marion’s vision of theology would entail a removal of a considerable portion of the theological heritage that makes up the larger portion of our history, including a bulk of the biblical witness. There have been 1500 years (since Pseudo-Dionysius) of theological contributions that can not, and should not, be cast aside because they are not apophatic in nature. In addition, as Roger Duncan states,

much of the work of phenomenology bears a striking resemblance to poetry.⁵ Is it possible for postmodern thinkers like Marion and Vattimo to see their work fitting in as *a* contribution to the larger whole instead of being *the* solution? Can we not benefit from both poetry and prose? Is there no room for a Gilson or Maritain within their vision of the Church? Perhaps Marion's move towards a phenomenology that thinks more positively of the idol, as was noted in the previous chapter, provides a future direction.

I believe a serious consideration should be given to conceptual language. This investigation may be able to produce a middle ground where it is admitted that as limited as language may be it still proves useful. It would seem that the goal of dismissing all concepts would be counterproductive as well as impossible. Further, Marion's attempt at rebuffing logic and sufficient reason is counterproductive even towards his goal, as was previously mentioned. A realization of the limits of language when applied to God is a must, but as I will elaborate further on, I think it can be done in ways other than that proposed by Marion and Vattimo. To do this I briefly present the solution of W. Norris Clarke and his thought concerning analogous language.

A further, separate point is that both Marion and Vattimo assert that revelation is the pinnacle and that all thought should flow from this source. Scholastic thought is then viewed as an unnecessary elaboration. But the question then remains, Why then do we need any elaboration whatsoever? Why not just read and be content to encounter the biblical texts directly? Vattimo may respond that revelation is encountered as a lived reality and therefore needs to be expressed anew each and every time one reads the scriptures and a consensus arrived at. This too presents problems as it provides no stability of inter-

⁵ Roger Duncan, "Emmanuel Levinas and the Light of Fides et Ratio," *Communio* XXIX.1 (Spring 2002): 113.

pretation and leaves the faithful in a state of perpetual flux and discontinuity with the past. Thus he holds that we are better off with a hearing of the text without further elaboration, in effect, liturgy without theology.

Marion's treatment of the various themes culminates in love. It is certainly hard to argue with a theology of love. However, stated simply, the love of which he speaks on one front lacks the necessary and supporting content, and where it does have content it runs the risk of falling into the idol that he is trying to avoid. Marion can not himself wholly avoid the possible idolatry of concepts from which he so ardently tries to distance himself even in his theology of *love*, a conceptual term, I might add, in its own right.

Both Marion and Vattimo are concerned with the dangers that may result from metaphysics on any number of fronts. They are concerned with how it will do damage to any thinking in relation to God. They are also concerned that a solidly constructed metaphysics will lead to a dangerous intolerance. A strong ontology leads to violence, or so they claim. That ideas can be dangerous or even deadly is beyond rational denial as the communist and socialist movements of the last century clearly indicate (a point which John Paul repeatedly made during his pontificate). Consider also the present day problems of the human slave trade and religious fundamentalism and the violence they perpetrate to see how belief systems can continue to manifest violence. George Weigel notes that the Lublin professors, John Paul included, were well aware the ideas had consequences as evidenced by the corpses they saw strewn across Europe in the wake of Nazi Germany and Communist Russia.⁶ That a particular metaphysics may incline one towards immoral and barbaric action is hard to deny. In fact it is the opinion of both Tresmontant

⁶ George Weigel, "Wojtyla's Walk Among the Philosophers," paper presented at the Proceedings of the Second Annual Fall Conference of the Simon Silverman Center- "The Phenomenology of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II," December 1-2 Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, 2006.

and John Paul, in advocating for the necessity of a metaphysics, that not just any metaphysics will do. However, one could not find in a rightly understood Thomas a single phylum of teaching that would lead to such barbarism.

The importance of the choice of philosophical systems can not be overestimated. This in fact is what Tresmontant strove so diligently to establish. Certain philosophies contain within themselves a metaphysical structure whether or not one wishes it to be so or not. Why is it then that Marion and Vattimo choose to buy into the thought of Nietzsche and other thinkers who stand in fundamental opposition to their Christian faith? One may counter that Aquinas did much the same in drawing from both Plato and Aristotle, both of whom were outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is a larger question than can be addressed here, but suffice it to say that each system must be evaluated on its own merits and trajectory. In addition, Aquinas and others were willing, and in fact did, make significant changes to the Greek thought they received. It may be asked if much of postmodern thought has bought into philosophical systems that are questionable as to their compatibility with Christian theology instead of following the trend of accepting what is helpful and jettisoning what is in opposition to Christian faith.

I have mentioned how Marion and Vattimo are in agreement that the metaphysical project should come to a halt, but I have not drawn sufficient attention to a significant point of difference. Marion's thought resonates more effectively in an Old Testament context. He is ever-waiting, living in hope for the coming of the Messiah. 1 John 1 would be a passage that would not fit well within his thought. For Marion, it would display too much touching, grasping and seeing. In contrast, Vattimo is just the opposite. He so much emphasizes the incarnational that God seems to have squeezed every last bit of transcen-

dence out of himself in becoming human (a form of Hegelianism). In this way the old adage *in media stat virtus* (or in this case *in media stat veritas*) may hold quite true. It seems as if Christian orthodoxy stands between either extreme.

As for a positive contribution coming from Vattimo we may look to some further development of his emphasis on consensus. There may be room here for some type of merging of his thought with that of the *sensus fidelium*. In an optimistic light we might be able to see how in dialogue and participation we may be led towards agreement. The area of contention may be found in agreeing upon who qualifies as the *fidelium*.

The most pressing question that I have for both Marion and Vattimo is fundamental and yet has gone unanswered, namely, have they sufficiently established that metaphysics is unneeded? Have they sufficiently argued that what they provide has superseded the metaphysical tradition of the past? Do they adequately explore questions of being, or questions that attempt to illuminate "the one and the many"? How do they attempt to explain the problem of change? These timeless metaphysical questions are not entertained but are rather set aside. As Paul Griffiths has stated in response to the projected thesis of Vattimo,

the first element in this theoretical gloss is the idea of the simple refusal. A whole vocabulary - that of truth, reality, objectivity, universality - is identified and refused. It is not argued against, not shown to be incoherent, not opposed by its mirror image, but simply refused. In rejecting realism, Rorty and Vattimo do not espouse or argue for anti-realism; and in rejecting metaphysics they don't argue (or even suggest, at least when they're being careful) that metaphysics is impossible. They are "post-metaphysical" rather than "anti-metaphysical": they aren't against metaphysics; they're simply *after* it, subsequent to it. They left it behind. Refusal is not denial. It is, instead, the abandonment of one lexicon and the deployment of another. Someone who turns from philosophy to jazz improvisation has not refused or rebutted philosophy, but merely refused or

abandoned it. To refute or rebut would still be to practice philosophy, and this Rorty and Vattimo do not wish to do.⁷

He states that instead of posing actual philosophical challenges to metaphysics, to which other philosophers may choose to give answers, they choose to narrate.

“Post-metaphysical historicists win, when they do, not by out-arguing their opponents, but by out-narrating them, by telling the story with sufficient verve and inventiveness that others also want to tell versions of it, and in doing so to abandon their older stories—in this case, the stories about truth and realism....A carefully consistent post-metaphysical historicism of this sort is not easy to refute, since it does not use a vocabulary in which refutation is even a recognizable item.”⁸

He goes on to attempt two answers to the postmodern challenge:

How, then, to respond? One perfectly proper response is to make one's own refusal. If something is offered, without argument, as an object of seductive charm, the offer can be refused without embarrassment or justification...the enterprise of post-metaphysical historicism requires for its own success that people listen, adopt, and imitate. Not doing this, therefore, serves as a refusal Rorty and Vattimo can recognize...but there is another kind of response that may sometimes be useful. It, too, is an intervention rather than an argument. Rorty and Vattimo can themselves be pegged, and it's easy enough for Christians to do this with our own technical lexicon. We can explain to ourselves what kind of performance Rorty and Vattimo offer. We can diagnose their performance as a bad case of *libido dominandi*, in which their own egos have been written so large that they must depict history as a story of progress culminating in their own genius. We can counter close to this unrestricted *superbia* the Christian virtue of humility. And we can narrate the emergence of post-metaphysical historicism as the last, dying gasp of a story the West has told itself about its own supremacy.⁹

⁷ Paul J. Griffiths, "The Future of Religion by Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo," *First Things* [New York] (June/July 2005) 40.

⁸ Griffiths, "The Future of Religion by Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo," 41.

⁹ Griffiths, "The Future of Religion by Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo," 42.

Griffiths' criticism is sharp. He does not indicate any sense of having benefited by contact with the works of postmodern thinkers such as Marion and Vattimo. Having no sense of appreciation for any of the contributions of postmodernism may not help Griffiths to win a hearing in certain circles. However, the criticism offered by Griffiths should not go unnoticed. It is easy to forget when being absorbed in the reading of postmodern thought that the dismantling of metaphysics and its defeat as proposed by postmodern literature has not been sufficiently established. Griffiths draws our attention to this fact. He asks us think about the method employed by postmodern thinkers, that of using persuasive and attractive rhetoric in place of logic and classical philosophical reasoning. He has us ask if the challenge of sophism has appeared once again in an updated form?

Section 6: Proposed Future Ways to Proceed

What I intend to do at this point is to offer some possibly promising directions for theology in light of the previous discussion which both take seriously the offerings of postmodern thought and explicate the merits of continuing the metaphysical tradition. This summary will offer proposed beginnings in light of the previous four chapters but should not be considered a holistic or complete evaluation of the question thus far examined. There are starting points in contemporary theology, which if rigorously maintained, offer no concession and allow no room for dialogue. Those who believe that anything less than a strict Thomism (in the tradition of the manuals) is a betrayal of the tradition, will end up doing their philosophizing in a such a provincial way as to give no hearing to postmodernism's positive offerings. Those postmodern thinkers who wish to eliminate all the cataphatic theology that has taken place between Pseudo-Dionysius and today will

also be sorely disappointed. They will miss out on authentically encountering the theological experience of men and women who have found the metaphysically replete theology of their day enlightening as well as amenable to growth in holiness and love of God. The added difficulty that we come upon through differing philosophical languages and systems admittedly poses a challenge, but it conversely offers an engaging opportunity.

Section 7: Analogous Language and God

At the heart of much of the argument offered by postmodern thinkers is a view of language which seeks to undermine its ability to convey meaning. For a vast majority of Catholic thinkers throughout history, the ability of language to adequately convey meaning has not been problematic. To remember that there have been similar challenges one has only to recall the nominalist controversy. As this pertains to the exercise of theology, we are crippled if we are not permitted the linguistic tools needed for investigation and expression. This linguistic doubt is more pronounced when referring to God. It is the conviction of postmodern theologians, like Marion, that we must rethink our use of language when speaking of God.

In the past the difficulty was recognized and was dealt with in a different manner. Early on, theologians realized that the terms employed when applied to human beings are radically different when applied to God. They found the solution to this problem in the use of analogous language. W. Norris Clarke has nicely laid out an explanation of how Thomas and others have handled this problem in his *The Philosophical Approach to God*. I will briefly recap his argument.

The solution posed by Thomas began as he and other medieval thinkers contemplated the names of God. The problem faced by Thomas, and still pertinent to theologians

today, is that, "all meaningful language about the real-world is drawn from a matrix of human experience, and that to use such language to talk about a being beyond our experience and not testable in experience is in principle impossible because it is empty of any content we can understand when applied to such a being."¹⁰

Clarke admits that there have previously been many so-called Thomistic explanations of analogy which were inadequately representative of Thomas. He notes that one attempt coming from the school of Cajetan was based on an earlier work of Thomas, which he later abandoned. Thomas then replaced it with a "more metaphysically grounded 'analogy of causal participation,' as it is now called."¹¹ Clark makes note that in his presentation he must only be interested in those analogous terms:

which express literally and properly, not metaphorically or by extrinsic denomination, some real intrinsic similarity found diversely but proportionately in all the analogates. Such analogies are called 'analogies of proper proportionality' in traditional Thomistic terminology and are the only ones which are really useful in metaphysics, especially in speaking about God. ... These objective real similarities are not in the order of forms or essences, strictly speaking, precisely because they range over many different forms and essences. ... Thus power can be exercised by an atom, a plant, and muscle, a mind, or a will; the modes of exercising it can be radically different in each case, yet we notice a genuine similarity, which we wish to express by the unified analogous term 'power.'¹²

These terms as they are used in reference to a wide number of divergent objects are purposely and systematically vague terms, according to Clarke. Any attempt to too narrowly define or pin down analogous language proves self-defeating for the purpose of using analogy. Such concepts must be flexible; it is what Clarke prefers to call a stretch concept. Clarke believes the mind capable of such a feat but cautions that an application of

¹⁰ W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The Philosophical Approach to God*, rev. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007) 70.

¹¹ Clarke, *The Philosophical Approach to God*, 72.

¹² Clarke, *The Philosophical Approach to God*, 72-73.

logic which seeks to too narrowly define terms to be used analogously can also be counterproductive. Analogy most properly functions within the *lived use* of language.

With this flexible use of concepts in place, Clark moves forward to ask how we can extend an analogous term beyond our present experience. His contention is that as the mind encounters realities beyond its experience, its inner dynamism propels it to an expansion beyond the horizon of consciousness to which the mind is implicitly disposed.

From the beginning of our intellectual life there is a necessary mutual co-involvement of being, intelligibility, and analogy. But as soon as we have found it either necessary or fruitful to expand the application of a particular attribute analogously to some new dimension of reality, we must immediately in the same act *purify* the meaning-content of this analogous term, rendering it less determinate and precise so that its possible range of applications will no longer be restricted by its presently experienced range of application. If the term we first pick is resistant to such inner stretching of meaning, we seek for another, broader one which will allow it.¹³

Clark then takes his thinking a bit further. He extends his analogous use of language to include God. He believes that Thomas points out the way in which we can bridge the gap between God and his creatures, giving us a meaningful way of speaking about him. This belief is found in causal participation, or efficient causality. Clarke writes,

It is the fundamental property of all efficient causality – a doctrine implicit in Plato but first laid down by Aristotle, echoed with some reservations by the neo-Platonic tradition, and systematically exploited by St. Thomas in his participation metaphysics—that every effect must in some way resemble its cause. Since all that the effect has comes from its cause and is the gift of the cause, and since the cause cannot give what it does not possess, at least in some higher equivalent way, then under pain of intelligibility there must be *some* resemblance between the effect and its cause, at least in the most fundamental order of existence and the latter's satellite property, such as unity.¹⁴

¹³ Clarke, *The Philosophical Approach to God*, 77.

¹⁴ Clarke, *The Philosophical Approach to God*, 79.

This leads us once again to a consideration of how to handle apophatic treatments of God. Clarke believes that creation itself forges a bond between God and his creatures. This relationship, he holds, should have us think of God as *infinitely higher* rather than *totally other*. This strikes at the heart of the proposed ways of thinking about God presented by many postmodern thinkers. Clarke posits that a God who is totally other does not relate to us in any fashion and in such a way does not allow for an attraction to God on our part. He finds the view of our being related to God consistent with Scripture and refers to the passage in Genesis where God says "let us make man to our own image and likeness." This passage hints at our participation in some of the perfections of God, be it ever so far off as the infinite is as compared to the finite.

Clarke additionally wishes to highlight one point which he finds indispensable for understanding Thomas. He stresses the "capital importance of the ontological bond of similitude deriving from causal participation as the indispensable metaphysical underpinning for giving meaning to language about God in Thomistic (and, I do not hesitate to say, I think any viable) philosophical theology....Cut the bond of causal similitude between God and creature which, outside direct mystical experience, is our only bridge across the unfathomable abyss between finite and Infinite, and there is no path left to the mystery shrouded peaks of the further shore."¹⁵

This brief examination of Clarke, while not a full examination of his thought or philosophy, does allow for a fruitful answer to the postmodern question of language and God. Marion and Vattimo have chosen to take another path, yet they have not adequately shown analogy, as here presented, to be an unachievable way of speaking about God. It

¹⁵ Clarke, *The Philosophical Approach to God*, 81.

may be as Griffiths has stated, that postmodern thinkers have chosen to sidestep metaphysics altogether. However, that leaves those of us who have not chosen to make such a move receptive to a renewed Thomistically inspired way of speaking about God.

Section 8: The Metaphysical Realism of the IAP

A number of years ago the International Academy of Philosophy in Liechtenstein undertook the project of pursuing studies in the movement called Phenomenological Realism. The University of Dallas furthered the project when they produced a Journal which prompted a number of scholars to join in this course of study. The goal of this journal, *Aletheia*, was indicated by its title which refers both to truth and reality. It attempted to pursue a course of philosophical study with an eye to truth in its purest form. Their goal was to pursue a philosophy “capable of knowing Being and Truth as they objectively are in themselves, as they are independently of human thought.” “The scope of this journal should be nothing less than the scope of the ‘*philosophia perennis*,’ understood as the questions and discoveries found among the greatest philosophers of all ages, as something more universal than any particular ‘school.’”¹⁶

The goal was to engage all schools of philosophy with a mind to look beyond systems in search of the truth. It was to seek a “universal philosophy” which was to lead thinkers beyond the specializations which they so often pursue in the current state of academia. As fond as some of the thinkers were of the thought of Thomas, they stated that “We are convinced that our resolution to proceed systematically cannot be carried out simply by reviving the system of Thomism.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Josef Seifert, "Forward," *Aletheia* [University of Dallas, Irving, Texas], 1 (June 1977) i.

¹⁷ Seifert, "Forward," *Aletheia*, iii.

They wanted to stress that their pursuit (although recognizing phenomenological insights) was not one of pure phenomenology, but of phenomenology coupled with realism. They modeled their thought on that of the early Husserl as found in *Logical Investigations*. They were convinced that the contribution of this approach had been vastly under-recognized. “What the public has yet to realize is that the ‘phenomenological realists’ discovered again that there are essential structures of being, which, being neither invented nor constituted by the human mind, are discovered by it, and which in their timeless validity precede both the changeable empirical things which they govern, as well as the changeable human mind which knows them.”¹⁸

As previously noted when presenting the offerings of Clarke, no cursory overview is adequate to give sufficient answer to the problems faced in this dissertation, especially when trying to bring together classical and postmodern theologians. Yet, this has been offered as a sign that there are efforts being made which seek to bring together divergent voices and seriously consider their perspectives on truth. I have cited the I.A.P. as one such group endeavoring to hear all voices with a mind to integrate the truth content presented.

Section 9: Conclusion

It has been the intention of this dissertation to consider both Claude Tresmontant and Pope John Paul II as they have contributed to the role of metaphysics within theology. This treatment in no way makes any pretense at being comprehensive, but rather has endeavored to explore both perspectives. It was then thought beneficial to have them enter into dialogue with the anti-metaphysical thought of Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vat-

¹⁸ Seifert, "Forward," *Aletheia*, v.

timo. I hoped to have presented the thoughts of both Tresmontant and John Paul in a way which compellingly yet critically showed the strength of their arguments as concerns the necessity of metaphysics. For Tresmontant it was found already present in the biblical texts, needing only to be drawn out and presented. For John Paul it was found in the need of a continued metaphysics tradition, able to adequately ground ethical thought while remaining a consistent witness to revealed truth, which is the task of the Church.

As for Jean-Luc Marion and Vattimo, I believe I have been sufficiently sympathetic to their projects in as much as they were able to be reconciled with Catholic philosophy and theology. I acknowledge the importance of the apophatic way and recognize the efforts made to remind us of this approach to knowing God and recognizing the limits inherent in conceptual language. I nonetheless feel that they fail when they attempt to elevate apophatic way as the only way, specifically as their proposals neglect metaphysical principles and thought inherent in the Biblical witness, as attested to by Tresmontant. I likewise think their project weak as it attempts to do away with the Christian heritage which has come to us through the ages and has been providentially guided. Continued dialogue is certainly needed, but not in a way that leaves the Christian faith devoid of its metaphysical heritage as John Paul clearly indicated.

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